SALVATION HERE AND HEREAFTER

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SERMONS AND ESSAYS.

BY

REV. JOHN SERVICE,

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SERMONS AND ESSAYS.

I.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

Luke xvi, 19-31.

OUR Lord's purpose in this parable is, I think, to startle us into serious religious thought, not to set forth a particular religious doctrine. If we look for a special doctrine in it, we shall find it difficult to agree as to what the special doctrine is. It is not, of course, that rich men go to hell because they are rich, and that beggars because they are beggars go to heaven. It is not that it is sin to have property and salvation to be a pauper. For in that case, for one thing, the road to hell would, contrary to Scripture, be difficult and the way to heaven easy; it being easy for us all to come to beggary if we wish, and hard for all of us to become rich, try how we will. Neither is it that a rich man is lost if he is a bad man, while a beggar if he is a good man is saved; for, besides that this is a lesson not worth teaching, nothing is said either as to the rich man being bad, or the beggar being good. You may say, of course, that

the doctrine is that in the world to come distinctions are final, that between class and class there is a gulf which cannot be passed ; but then, in that case, what we should like to know is, what the classes are, and why they are so separated, and this the parable does not help us to understand.

Look for a particular religious doctrine in this parable, I say, and you will have difficulty in finding one—one about which many would agree. Its purpose I believe to be wider and greater—viz., to awaken serious thought. The curtain is the picture. The story is the doctrine. It is a flash of lightning in the night, which lightens up a familiar landscape under an unfamiliar aspect and awakens in the spectator unfamiliar feelings. It is a glimpse of the world of human life, in which reality bursts through appearance with the crash of doom, in which the tremendous possibilities that lie hid under cover of some superficial class distinctions overturn these distinctions, and by the suddenness and violence with which they do it force from us the question, Is there indeed something besides appearance and much more than appearance ?

We have here neither Pharisee and publican, nor Jew and Gentile, nor any characters which might turn our minds off upon considerations of place, or time, or religious profession, or anything of that sort. We have two men, such as men everywhere are, and must be, the one rich, the other poor. What happens to these two happens to all

men; reality in their case, as in every case, outlives and surmounts appearance; the distribution of "good things" and "evil things" which sunders them in the one sphere, leaves them, when it comes to an end, the possibilities of good and evil that belong to the other, and among these possibilities we see there are the rich man's Hades, and the beggar's Paradise. You may find an answer to the question, Who is the rich man and who is Lazarus, in other parables and other teaching of Christ; you may find it too in Moses and the prophets. You will find, if you inquire, that the rich man figures often among the poor and the beggar among the rich; but the purpose of the story concerning these two is not to teach us to make fine distinctions of character, but to bring out, as regards human life, the broad distinction between appearance and reality, and to force us to attend to that distinction—in a word, as I have said, to awaken in us religious thought.

In this view of the parable I do not need to puzzle myself about words or phrases contained in it. I certainly do not need to suppose that when the rich man speaks of being "tormented in this flame," we are to understand that Christ teaches us that there is a real lake of fire and brimstone in which living men are to burn to all eternity. I do not need to suppose this any more than to suppose that Abraham's bosom is the bosom of the patriarch Abraham. The parable is not mixed with history or doctrine; it is parable and

nothing else. The rich man asking for water across the gulf which no one could pass—Abraham replying to him across that gulf—he replying to Abraham—Abraham again replying to him—all this is grotesque if you forget that the whole story is a parable. If you forget this, Abraham's bosom and the place of torment, so contiguously placed, and having such close communications, become absurd too. Christ took the common language of his day about the invisible world, and made use of it in this parable, certainly never intending that any part of it should be quoted to substantiate this or that theory of hell or heaven, or in regard to either "to thicken proofs which do demonstrate thinly." It was the purpose of this parable, I repeat, to awaken thought, not to teach doctrine; its language therefore is not indeed exaggerated (for exaggeration is here impossible), but it is bold, pictorial, imaginative.

Few men think much of anything but the outward appearance, the outward and superficial distinctions, in human life; most men never think of anything else. Even where there is religious profession and religious talk, there is in this sense little religious thought. This in which we live is a real world in its way; you may call it an illusion, or a cheat, or vanity, or what you will, but at any rate there are some things in it which are real enough to flesh and blood. The comforts of abundance like the rich man's, the wretchedness

of poverty and disease like those of Lazarus, are, in a fashion, real. These things and the like of these are real to bodily sense, and bodily sense every one has. Compared with these, good and evil in the form of what is spiritual, are more or less unreal except to those who are spiritual, and they are few. Thus it is, that if we are like the mass of men, we are more or less earnest and engrossed in those outward things which superficially distinguish man from man—so much in earnest about them, and so much engrossed, that we forget to think how much or how little there is behind and beyond these distinctions. What man is as man gets little of our notice, because so much of it is given to what men have or want. The contrasts which strike us most are those made by wealth and poverty. The differences of which we make most account or most constant account, are differences of outward estate. By custom we regard this outward estate not as if it were only for a time, and only a part of life, but as if it were the whole and everlasting. Happy man, we say, looking at a rich man—wretched man, we think, seeing a beggar go by. To our minds in their ordinary mood, if we are ordinary men, and even ordinary Christians, it is as if all of human life were on the surface and we saw it all, so that any change in the outward appearance must be of grave consequence, and nothing could be of consequence so grave as a great change in that. We have, perhaps, religious opinions, including views of a

hereafter, and according to them we ought in our way of thinking to go much beyond the present moment and the outward shows of things. But in point of fact we do not. We seldom know well, and often we do not consider at all, what sort of life, what sort of experience, a man has in himself, besides what he has in his means and substance. Whatever views we may have of heaven or hell, or the importance of character, they do not materially lessen our sense of the importance of distinctions of the outward estate and condition. It is as if the things that are seen were eternal. It always costs us an effort, and often a great effort, to conceive of a state of things different from the present—different in this, that those distinctions which riches and poverty, prosperity and adversity, health and disease make between men, shall be less important than they are here or shall have no place at all. Our regular and customary way, in a word, is to look at human life as if we saw it all when we see what we cannot help seeing—its outward conditions.

Now, this parable is meant to take us, as it were, by storm, and, once for all, out of this way of regarding life; and with this view it parts circumstances and conditions, separates riches and poverty, Dives and Lazarus in another world, as they are parted and separated in our common modes of thought—only it makes the distance between them that between heaven and hell, instead of something less, to which our calculations point, and then, so to

speak, it puts that in heaven which we put in hell, and puts that in hell which we put in heaven—it does this, it takes this startling line, in order to force us to ask, Can such things be? is it thus things are, so different from what they seem?

It is not then, as I believe, the purpose of this parable to teach us a doctrine or doctrines. Certainly it is not its intention to teach us that rich men because they are not poor go to hell, and that beggars because they are not rich go to heaven. Yet I venture to remark, that if we might find in it any trace of a doctrine at all, it would be doctrine as to wealth and poverty, as to those good things and those evil things by which the outward lot of men is most conspicuously diversified. "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." As I think of these words, I have to ask myself whether the law of exchange or compensation, at which they not vaguely hint, to which, indeed, they give the most unequivocal expression, which constitutes the *argument* of the story, and the ground-work of its action—I have to ask myself, I say, whether this law of exchange or of compensation is only invented, so to speak, for the occasion, or whether it has any existence in fact. Is that which is so pat to the purpose of the story, so essential to its framework, altogether wide of the truth of things, so wide that as far as we follow the story with interest and with feeling, we

diverge from truth into one of the many tracks of error. I cannot suppose it; I cannot think that where the story explains its own course and movement, the explanation is drawn from the side of the improbable and impossible, and not from that of the credible and actual.

It is most true that at their death the rich man and the beggar are equal, equal so far as absolute poverty at the moment can make them so. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Naked we came into the world, naked we return to the dust. But when it is granted that the rich man and the beggar are equal at the moment of death, the fact remains that they were not equal before; and if everything is to be accounted for, that fact must also be reckoned and explained. Is it not, then, suggested to us here, and is it not consistent with all we know, or believe, or hope of the Eternal Righteousness and Goodness to suppose that whereas good things and evil things are here unequally distributed, this inequality will hereafter be redressed, so that as far as any man has had reason to complain that his lot here was hard, he will have amends made to him hereafter; so that the beggar who has had his evil things here will be comforted hereafter; and the rich man who has had his good things, will, by comparison with the beggar, be tormented. It must be so. Justice must be done. There is no heaven to fall, there is no righteousness which governs and is supreme,

if justice is not to be done. It is true that poverty no more than wealth, beggary and sores no more than purple and fine linen, produce always one sort of character; it does not follow that because a man is afflicted he must learn what affliction has sometimes taught—patience, and fortitude, and trust in God. Too often, as regards character, the result of poverty is as fatal as the result of luxury. Give me neither poverty nor riches, was a prayer dictated by common-sense, if not by piety. The school of extreme poverty, like the school of excessive luxury, turns out some of the worst specimens of mankind. Yet for all that, if you take a wide view of the government of this world, supposing it to be a government of goodness, you must see that it is probable, to say the least, that all privation and pain and suffering and loss to which men are subjected now will be made use of hereafter. Does God waste that wretchedness, of which the best instincts of the human heart teach us to be most painfully sparing? Does the Eternally Good, the Father of Christ, allow misery to swallow up in its blackest depths so many mortal lives without any intention that anything should ever come of it? I cannot suppose it. My belief is that nothing is wasted in this universe, and especially no woe of any human being. If this be your belief can you not suppose that the beggar's misery may be turned to account in the way of teaching him to know what true blessedness is, that by his poverty he may be put in the

way of the acquisition of the true riches? Can you not imagine that some profit might be made for Lazarus out of his experience at the rich man's gate as a preparation for that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand?—is it not possible to fancy that somehow the soul which has never known anything but want and wretchedness in this life should have a way of its own in another life of taking in any blessedness which is there? May we not say, using the most general terms we can find, that it is not only no loss for a beggar to lose his misery, but that out of a lifetime of misery like the beggar's there is this which a man can carry away with him—a certain aptitude, or talent, or genius, for the appreciation of any happiness to be met with elsewhere?

On the other hand, it does not need to be said that, while it is no loss for the beggar to lose his poverty, it is a loss to the rich man to lose his riches. Apart altogether from any questions as to the punishment which "every sin deserves," is it not most certain that the rich man who has had his good things here, and who by his use of them or misuse (call it what you will) makes the possession of them his good, and the loss of them his evil—is it not most certain, I say, that he must be tormented in a different state of existence from this—by comparison tormented, if only Lazarus and himself are placed on a footing of equality as regards having none of them. He who has had his good things and loses them, requires also to lose

his relish for them in order to be content with nothing or to appreciate other things. Thus while it is easy to suppose the beggar comforted by the loss of his rags, it is equally easy to suppose the rich man tormented by the loss of his purple and fine linen.

It is not necessary to make fine distinctions. All that is needful is to recognize the fact that, whereas no man can love beggary and bodily sores, a man can love purple and fine linen, and sumptuous fare, so as to have no relish or to lose all relish for other things; to this extent a man can pamper his body so as to lose his soul. And so it may be, nay, must be, that while we can carry nothing out of this world in the shape of wealth, yet the wretch who goes out of it with the sense of lifelong misery takes with him what may be profitable to him in eternity; while he who goes out of it with the sense that he has had his good things and has been deprived of them takes with him that which might make a hell of heaven.

If there is anything in the shape of doctrine here to be found, it is this—doctrine surely, which is worthy of the Son of Man, revealing the Father of All, making plain the impartial and eternal goodness with which this world and every world is ordered—Let the poor take comfort; let the rich take heed. God is no respecter of persons. Behold, there are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first.

But I repeat once more, that the purpose of this

parable is greater and wider than to teach us some one religious lesson. It is to awaken us once for all to serious, to religious thought. If there is reality, if heaven and hell belong to it, what is it? The parable puts us on asking this. And when we ask the question we have not far to go for an answer. It is the good and the evil, not of the outward condition and estate, but the good and the evil of disposition and character with which are bound up for men the issues of life and death, the possibilities of that good which we call heaven, and that evil which we call hell. All experience and, not alone, all Scripture, teaches us this. A beggar, in virtue of his character, may be enviable; a rich man, in spite of his purple and fine linen, may be an object of pity. Do you wish to sound the deepest depths of misery? do you wish to scale the topmost heights of blessedness? You cannot do either by the way of beggary or the way of luxury, but you can do it by the love of evil or the love of goodness. It is not a revelation of things beyond our ken, outside of our experience, but a revelation of things that were and are and ever shall be, the most certain and most real of all things, which is made by any religion worth the name. It is a fact which transcends all facts as well in its certainty as in its importance, and not a doctrine or a theory resting upon doubtful authority, or limited observation, that the good of this life and all life is goodness, and the misery of this life and all life is sin. We are human; therefore

our life turns in its larger movements and its greater issues, not upon meat and drink and clothing, but upon right and wrong, upon truth and falsehood, upon selfishness and kindness, upon passion indulged and passion regulated,—not upon the needs of the body, but upon the wants of the soul. Search the world, and you will not find one corner of it containing one man where the law has not been and is not, that the soul that sinneth it shall die, and the soul that loves good it shall eat and be satisfied. Talk to us of heaven and hell, as this parable does, and bid us ask what these things may be, and we are driven, turn where we will, to one conclusion. These things mean good and evil, righteousness and iniquity, salvation from selfishness and sin, the condemnation of vice and hardness of heart.

We forget this in our common worldly ways and thoughts. However we may feel the certainty and truth of it when we set ourselves deliberately to think of it, we forget it in our everyday life. We look with envy upon the rich ; we shrink with horror from the beggar's unsavoury doom. We do not, to the same extent, or so instinctively, envy the good man and shudder at the man of mean and impure spirit. The temporary and superficial distinctions in human life are what occupy our minds. How much keener than other feelings the regret in many of our minds that the lot of the many is to be poor. How few are there who do not feel as if the best of worlds would be

one in which the lot of the many would be to be rich.

But if we only took to heart, in any measure, what this parable teaches; if the tremendous possibilities it shadows forth were in any degree present to us as facts; if we were disposed, that is to say, to serious religious thought, how different would be our views of things and our experience of the world. We should not envy the rich man more than we envy the good man; we should not despise and pity the poor man more than we pity or despise the mean or selfish man. We should not feel as if life were lost or gained according as our lot is that of the many poor or the few rich. With the sense that heaven and hell are behind the outward appearance in every man's life, we should be concerned about meat and drink and clothing as for to-day, and about other things—righteousness, truth, goodness—as for ever. We should bear poverty with cheerfulness as thinking it God's opportunity and ours, and we should use wealth as thinking it not our own but His.

Thus if we but tasted the powers of the world to come as this parable might teach us to do; if religious thought were but awakened in us as this parable might awaken it; if we only looked at things as this parable would have us look at them, not in the outward appearance, but in the eternal reality, what a step we should take in the direction of that highest blessedness called heaven, and away from that deepest misery called hell! The

effect of this would not be that we should be prompted to make a hell of this world in order to make a heaven of the next; its effect would not be that we should have to go about bemoaning ourselves and asking how we are to escape the wrath to come, by what sort of belief or assurance that we believe something, are we to make sure of being taken at last to Abraham's bosom. If we but tasted the powers of the world to come as they are to be tasted here, felt that these powers are the awful powers of good and evil with which we have had to do every moment of our lives—with which, whether we will or no, we have more to do than with anything else; and if thus our supreme concern were to cleave to that which is good, and to depart from that which is evil, we should enjoy salvation, and not merely expect it; we should be in heaven, instead of only hoping to escape from hell.

Is not this a parable, then, worthy of Him whom we call the Light of the world? This undoctrinal view of the universe, how full it is of the great doctrine of the Gospel that God is our Father! Here He is no taskmaster, reaping where He has not sowed, and gathering where He has not strawed, demanding from all men alike that which He has made it impossible for most to give. Here He is that universal and eternal Father who, alike when He gives and when He withholds, in His distribution of good things and of evil things, remembers justice and does not forget to

be kind; asks only from those who have, requires much only from those to whom much is given, and of them to whom little has been given requires little, and even that little only where their good requires it.

On any view of this parable the reference to Moses and the prophets with which it ends must be significant; but in this view its significance is obvious. In favour of reality, the counterpart of appearance, with which religious thought and religious belief, properly so called, has to do, no miraculous witness needs to be adduced. Moses and the prophets, the great and good whose memories we revere, who, being dead, in virtue of their greatness yet speak, are ample witness to it since no witness whatever is required. If we feel, if our own experience teaches us, that life is good or evil according as it is well or ill lived, that there is good in righteousness, and the last extremity of evil in all falsehood and iniquity, Moses and the prophets, our religious pioneers and guides, will then teach us much which it is profitable for us to learn, in order that we may follow in their footsteps, and live lives like theirs. But if we feel nothing of this, if in all our experience nothing of this has been brought home to us, neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead. All the apparitions, divine or diabolic, that could be imagined could never serve to convince a human soul that truth and goodness are other or better than falsehood and

iniquity, or that any of these things belong to reality, much less that they are reality, compared with which all else is but appearance. A ghost might be an authority among ghosts, an unexceptionable or a powerful witness in their affairs; but no ghost could furnish any new testimony or any testimony whatever to that reality with which men have to do as long as they are in the body and are not without souls. It is not something strange and miraculous that we have to think or believe if we are to be religious in our thought and in our belief—something for which we must have supernatural witness: it is that great fact of all human experience to which Moses and the prophets, and Christ himself bear constant testimony, that goodness is life and evil is death.

Last of all, I cannot but remark, that we turn away from the rich man of this parable with a feeling of pity. There was some humanity left in him by his selfish and sensual life. He was anxious that his five brethren should not come into this place of torment. The parables of our Lord, the Scriptures in general, do not give us those pictures of human beings converted into fiends which abound in religious literature. Among the accepted notions as to the place of perdition, one of the most unquestioned is that there good is not, not even as a recollection, but that evil is good. You cannot take that meaning out of this parable. Rich man as he was, the rich man of this parable was very ignorant, as ignorant and unthinking and

unidea'd as the mass of men, rich and poor, everywhere are. He belonged to the great majority, the children of the night; he was one of that great host of spiritual infants and imbeciles with whom all that is beyond the sphere of sense, all that concerns religion, is unreal, out of the course of nature, not born with the man, but created by arbitrary commandments, and to whom, therefore, the best or only witness to religious truth is a miracle, a portent, something which is neither matter nor spirit, neither dead nor alive, neither of earth nor of heaven, a ghost, one risen from the dead. But still, beggarly as was his soul, he was not without a heart. He was earnest with Abraham about his five brethren. Now, for my part, if I were going to argue anything upon this ground, I should not argue that sinners in the next world are past all hope and all feeling of what is good, but rather that even the prayer of a lost soul must find some response with God. Will any one tell me that a man can be represented as praying in the place of torment that his brethren may not be allowed to come into it, and that God, who is the Father of all men, can be supposed to have so much less humanity than a man as not to heed whether the suppliant himself is to remain for ever in that place? Will you make men out more humane than God? Will you represent men as concerned about their kinsmen lest they should go to hell, and then will you represent Him as not caring if as many as are once there stay there?

If you do so it must be upon some other ground than any that you find in this parable.

There is a real heaven and a most real hell, which all figures of speech only feebly serve to describe ; it is the heaven of doing God's will as it was done by Christ; it is the hell of loving anything more than we love goodness and God who is good. Because the lake of fire and brimstone is a figure of speech do not suppose that there is no hell; that though no such lake exists, all the torment which has been imagined as belonging to that lake may not be got out of evil. Fools make a mock at sin. The wise tremble at the shadow of a shade of guilt in thought, or word, or deed, knowing that the wages of sin is death. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, he that soweth unto the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

II.

THE SPIRITUAL THEORY OF ANOTHER LIFE.

(*Reprinted from "The Contemporary Review," April*, 1871.)

HOWEVER vain it may be, or may seem to be, to speculate on the nature of our future existence, it is impossible not to do so. So many crude and ridiculous, or coarse and repulsive, attempts have been made to penetrate the invisible world and describe it to us, the feeling is natural, and it is strong in many minds at the present moment, that it were better if we had seen the last of any endeavours to lift the veil which hides it from our view. In the present insurrection, too, of the human mind against all dogma, the remark of Goethe has great weight with many: We may well leave the next world to reveal itself to us in due time; we shall be soon enough there and know all about it. But still it is not a question whether we will or will not speculate on the subject. It is impossible not to speculate; we are

impelled to it by the very constitution of our minds. We live as much almost in the future as in the present; more passionately often, and therefore more really, in the one than in the other. What may be going to happen to us to-morrow, or next year, is of importance to us to-day. Eternity is a part of time, as the ocean is portion of a fisherman's garden, whose cottage is on the shore. The wonder is not, therefore, that some people feel so much curiosity about a future state, but that there are any people who feel none.

The title of the present article has been suggested, of course, by Isaac Taylor's "Physical Theory of Another Life." We should have preferred a less ambitious one, but none equally suitable and more modest has occurred to us. Perhaps, however, the adoption of it may be felt to be so far justified or excused if we succeed in our aim, which is to show that there are certain positive data on which to found a spiritual theory of another life, and that these, at least, point in a direction which can hardly be mistaken. It would be strange indeed if any fresh data of this sort remained to be discovered by anybody at this time of day, especially within the compass of the Scriptures, or if any one were found to have anything absolutely new to communicate respecting another world. But, on the other hand, possibly the time may have come when changes in theological opinion and the development of certain lines of Christian thought not only admit of a restatement of the

question, or demand it, but when these changes and this development have given consistency in the general Christian mind to ideas and principles bearing upon futurity, which formerly were traced in the faintest colours and the most uncertain lines. Hateful as the word may have been made to many sincere Christians, there has been a "development" beyond question in Christian dogma. In spite of passionate denials, the unimpassioned student of theology traces distinctly a line of growth along which the Church of Christ has moved in respect to some of the most important articles of her creed. Dogmas which the Calvinist of to-day holds in a shape as definite as so many propositions in mathematics, were, if they were anything, vague sentiments of Christian minds in earlier ages. It may be, then, in regard to the question of a future state, that while no discovery is possible in regard to it, except by the way of one coming back from the dead, we are now in a position to see some of its bearings more distinctly than people who lived ten hundred years ago, or even last century.

Eternity is a question of the day. It is as if an altogether unprecedented curiosity on the subject of the hereafter had seized the human mind within the last few years, so numerous have been the books, tracts, sermons written on the subject. We do not pretend to have read even all those among them that have achieved some notoriety; but judging by those with which we are acquainted, there is one point on which they are generally

agreed, and that is that the subject of which they treat is one of which nothing, or next to nothing, is, or indeed can possibly be known. Strong curiosity, and not only curiosity but hope and desire, are awakened in regard to a certain remote region ; but being an utter blank on all the maps, and being declared to be unexplored and unexplorable, its topography is determined and delineated, the blank space on the map is filled up, according to the fancy of each individual mind. This is perhaps a not unjust account of the voluminous literature of the last few years relating to a future state. It is a literature the diversity of which is remarkable ; but on this point it seems to speak with a unanimity and assurance more remarkable still—viz., that we *know* nothing of the matter to which it all relates. Dean Alford, in his well-known sermons on "the State of the Blessed Dead," reiterates this with great emphasis. His volume, indeed, as one of the latest contributions to this literature of the utterly unknown, may be considered a representative volume. Its concluding pages are an assertion of our ignorance of the whole subject ; they tell us that all that has been revealed of the state of the blessed dead is, that they shall ever be with the Lord—a statement which, as the author argues, leaves us in almost total darkness. In what is to come we shall follow the lead of Dean Alford, so far as to limit our view almost exclusively to the state of the blessed dead. But we hope to be able to show that the idea that we *know*

nothing, or next to nothing, of that state is one which requires to be somewhat modified.

But before attempting to do this, we have to remark another point in regard to which writers on the subject of another life seem to be agreed—a point with respect to which there is among them the most wonderful apparent diversity and the most thorough actual unanimity. It follows naturally from the notion that we *know* nothing of heaven, that the pictures which have been drawn of it should be of the most diverse character. Where nothing is known, where all is blank and void, imagination has free scope, different minds paint not what they see, but what they wish and what they hope. As are the hopes and wishes of the designer, so are the colours and the lines of his picture. Thus sorrow for the dead has its own heaven; it is the meeting and recognition in a better world of loving Christian friends. Intellectual ardour has its own heaven—endless progress in knowledge, prosecuted without earthly impediments amid stars and suns of illimitable illuminated space. Then again—sad witness of the woes of this present world—there are countless representations of heaven which exhibit it as a place of freedom from all sin, pain, trouble, want, sickness, death; a place enriched with all manner of pure, unfading enjoyments, and filled with the sweet incense of continual adoration and thanksgiving. Nothing, or next to nothing, is thought to be *known* of heaven. These are some of the various ideas

which minds differently constituted have formed to themselves of it. With such varieties of line and figure and colour has the blank space on the maps been filled up. Not less remarkable, however, than this apparent diversity is the real unanimity which underlies it. With only imagination for a guide in so vast a region as eternity, we might have expected that men would wander off on trackless, ever-diverging paths. It is wonderful to find that in point of fact whatever road they take they always come very soon to the same point. That point is the blessedness of self in heaven. However different their representations of heaven, they agree to represent it as a state of gratified and glorified selfishness—of blessedness which appeals above all to selfish desire and selfish hope. However noble and godlike the attainments, however pure or lofty the gratification, however refined or exalted the enjoyment of which we are told as entering into that blessedness, it is still attainment, gratification, enjoyment, for which we have no other or better name than selfish. Worldliness, the predominance of the lower self, figures to itself the goal of a happy life to be "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," or, less poetically, comfort, independence, ease. "Other-worldliness" the predominance of the higher self, has figured to itself the goal of a Christian life to be holiness, peace, glory. Both seem, though in different ways, alike selfish. Starting with the assumption that we know nothing of heaven, and resorting to the aid of

the imagination to gain some conception of its blessedness, the conception, it would seem to be proved by a vast existing literature, at which men naturally arrive is, that heaven is the regenerated self beatified and glorified — the new Adam restored to the old garden, and needing not to dress it and to keep it. The truth of this conception, thus stated at any rate, will appear questionable. But, suppose it true, one inference from it claims here a moment's notice. Heaven in that case would have every conceivable attraction for rational and moral beings, except the greatest of all—occupation. This has not escaped the notice of Dean Alford.

"I need hardly press it on you," he says, "that it is impossible to conceive of man in a high and happy estate without employment worthy of that estate, and *in fact constituting its happiness*. . . . . To read some descriptions of heaven, one would imagine that it were only an endless prolongation of some social meeting ; walking and talking in some blessed country with those whom we love."

It is disappointing, however, to find that in what follows he seems to give us for occupation in "that glorious land" chiefly "the attainment of and advance in the light and knowledge peculiar to it." In his pages, as in those of so many other writers, while we gaze up into heaven, not Jesus the crucified, but the spectre of self, seems to flit across the field of vision. We do not mean to suggest that, on this score, the blessedness of heaven is com-

monly exaggerated. Self is a part of us, if only a part; and blessedness which is not in any degree that of self would be not human, and not blessedness. But to speak of blessedness so purely selfish, as even the attainment of light and knowledge, constituting the blessedness of eternity, argues, we think, a strange forgetfulness of facts in time which are much to the point. The best of men in this present world do not find their highest and truest blessedness even in such high pursuits as the attainment of light and knowledge, or, indeed, in any pursuits however high which are purely selfish. The best of this present life for the worthiest and noblest of our race, for those to whom life, after all, yields its best, is that it is a field for the display of moral activity and the exercise of moral energy, and that it yields to the moral worker a perpetual harvest of incomparable satisfactions and enjoyments. David Livingstone (to mention one name which naturally occurs to a Scotchman), wandering through Africa on a moral errand—an errand of pure humanity—drinks even in the burning and alien desert from fountains of deeper satisfaction than he would have done if he had stayed at home and cultivated his own farm and his own soul. We see no such room anywhere in heaven as in the heart of Africa for this moral activity, if the common representations of heaven are correct. They do not seem to provide at all for the exercise of some of the noblest and best feelings of our nature. They seem to say, "Hold! enough!"

to what is most sublime and glorious in man's being and history—his love of his kind, his courage, his magnanimity, his patience, his pity, his self-sacrifice. They superannuate the moral part of man. In reply to the question, "We are beings endowed with moral and spiritual faculties and energies, what then are we to do in eternity?" they seem to answer "Nothing; you are not to do, but to be. Your career as a moral agent is ended; you will become higher and nobler; but it is no more yours to do and dare. You have returned to God and are stopped. Those moral and spiritual energies in your nature, which were developed with so much pain and at so much cost, being developed, have served their turn, and now as regards use are counted with the swords and banners of forgotten wars."

We do not wish here to say anything of what seems the necessary deterioration of a moral being any of whose moral energies, and especially the highest and noblest, are no longer actively exercised. It would lead us too far from our main point to argue, as we think we might, that if men ceased to exercise pity, self-denial, courage, they would, from the inevitable narrowing of a nature whose faculties are not used, degenerate from heavenly perfections into some of those very earthly imperfections which make some Christians ridiculous and others intolerable. But apart from this, and looking only at the fact that they do not provide for—or rather seem to exclude—the exercise of some of the

noblest energies of our nature, we find ample reason for being dissatisfied with the views which have been, with so much unanimity, propounded from the imagination as to the state of the blessed dead.

We return, however, from what has been imagined of heaven to the question, whether it is true, as we have seen it to be so generally assumed, that we have to imagine everything, that we *know* nothing, regarding it.

There is one passage of Scripture which, as our readers know, has been so often referred to heaven, that we hardly think of heaven without thinking of it—the passage quoted from Isaiah in 1 Cor. ii: "But the things which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, God hath revealed to us through his Spirit." Did this passage refer to heaven, as so many uncritical readers have assumed, it would seem explicitly to deny the possibility of acquiring any knowledge of heavenly blessedness. But referring, as we need not say it actually does, in the first place, to the present experience of Christian believers, but yet, of course, indirectly also to the future—all that God hath prepared for them that love Him, not certainly being contained in the sphere of the present life—it is a passage which not only does not declare it to be impossible to obtain any positive knowledge of heaven, but in its double reference to the present and the future, it offers

itself as a finger-post to inquiry. Heaven is not inconceivable to any human heart, to even the wordliest and grossest natures, as heaven has been painted. The blessedness of freedom from all earthly pain, sorrow, death, even sin and imperfection—that blessedness it does not require "genius in its most gifted hour," let alone the seeing eye of faith, to perceive and admire. But the blessedness of what is not so remote and not so strange—the blessedness of Christian life here upon the earth, of those things that God hath prepared for them that love him here—this blessedness eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard. No mind, no heart, which is without a measure of real, though it may be unconscious, Christian enlightenment and grace, can understand or feel how there can be the highest good and the truest blessedness in a life of unselfishness, in suffering with and for others, in self-sacrifice. This is eternally the most inconceivable of all things to a selfish and altogether worldly nature. This is the mystery which has been hid from ages and generations—hid to the many, open to the few. In this respect, this often-quoted passage in Corinthians really asserts a mystery with regard to the present life which has been supposed to belong only to the life to come. The mystery is as to what we see, not as to what we see not. And the inquiry is started by this, whether really what we know of Christian life here is not also knowledge possessed by us in regard to the life which is to come—whether the problem in regard to futurity is not simply to

understand the present. He who can tell what God hath prepared for them that love Him here, can he not also give us important information as to what He hath prepared for them hereafter?

With this question in our minds, we turn to consider the blessedness of Christian life now. We have already partially indicated our views upon this point, and wish to confine ourselves in speaking farther of it to what is least questionable and most important. If we were asked, then, to say from the words, and from the life of Christ, and from what we know of the lives that have most perfectly embodied the spirit of His life—if we were asked to say from this what the blessedness of Christian life is, we should certainly not say that it is a lot made happy and contented by Christian piety, not even assurance, doubly sure, of personal salvation through Christ, but rather the blessedness which there is for an unselfish spirit in the exercise of moral and spiritual energies, directed to the glory of God and the good of men—the blessedness, in a word, of self-sacrifice. Were we asked this question as to Christian blessedness, we should select for an example of it, not some member of the Christian Church, who, since he became such, has found the path of life much smoothed and the pleasures of life much increased, but rather we should turn to such a man as one we have already named, David Livingstone—a man whose way through the world since he became a Christian has been over rough

and dangerous ground, but who, in toiling and suffering for the good of the world and the glory of God, has found for himself in the huts of savages, and in the burning desert among wild beasts, enjoyment which it has been pain for him to relinquish, even temporarily, for the pleasures of piety in a drawing-room. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Remember these words, and you have the key to the blessedness of Christian life, to the whole Gospel of God's grace, and to all human experience, to revelation, and to history. It is the key to the mystery of God sending his Son into the world, to remember the Son's words—to know that the great Possessor is the great Giver, that the Highest of all is the Best of all, that it is His glory not to smite, but to heal, not to destroy, but to save, to bless the evil and the good, to comprehend all in His infinite beneficence. It is the key to the life and the death of Christ. He, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. In sounding the uttermost depths of outward and seeming humiliation, and real sorrow and anguish, He tasted also of the deepest and purest fountains of divine peace and joy. To the eyes of men, and indeed actually, the one holy and perfect life that was ever lived, was passed on the cold wet sands from which the tide of happiness had ebbed utterly away; but there rolled into that life, invisibly yet really, the whole boundless ocean of divine love

and divine joy. "My peace I give unto you." "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you." That which is the key to Christ's life is the key to history, to the life of man. He who has most carefully sought to receive and most carefully shunned to give has ever been the great loser. The sunshine and the flowers exist but for glad souls. Joys are only for the generous heart. The best and noblest of our race have thrown away their lives only to live truly and live for ever. Human history, now almost itself becoming an inspired oracle, teaches us from many an evangelical page that he does not know what true life is who takes his notions of it from the songs of ancient heathen poets, and from the no less heathen judgments of the modern street and market-place—who does not know, with heroes and saints and martyrs, and humble unknown benefactors of their kind in all ages, of all lands, of all creeds, the strange, deep blessedness of denying ourselves, and striving and suffering for the good of others.

The blessedness, then, of Christian life is essentially that of all moral and spiritual existence, created and uncreated, and it is, in a word, and above all, self-sacrifice. Grant this, and it follows that we are not without positive knowledge on the subject of spiritual life beyond the grave. No reason that we know of can be assigned for supposing that in another world spiritual life will not only undergo modification,

but revolution in its essential character; that its self-sacrifice here will become selfishness there. No such change can be imagined taking place in the nature of spiritual existence in its supreme manifestations. If, as it would be hard for any one to deny who believes the Gospel, it has been and is the divine blessedness to give and bless and save and even suffer, we do not suppose that any one imagines this will not always continue to be the divine blessedness. Even those stern dogmatists, who, as we may think, attribute severity or even ferocity to the divine nature, do not impute to it variableness, or the least shadow of turning. As it exists in God the Father, and in Christ, who is the manifestation at once of His life and blessedness, spiritual life cannot be imagined to be under any circumstances anything but what it has been and is. It is impossible to imagine the case reversed as regards the sons of God in the second rank—their spiritual life not only modified but revolutionized. Even upon this ground we find ourselves at issue with those who think that we *know* nothing of heaven, and are dissatisfied with their imaginative representations of it. In these imaginative representations we are witnesses of a transformation of spiritual life of which no rational account is given us. We see in them, without reason assigned, those whose deliberate and, indeed, inevitable choice has been the pleasure of perpetual struggle, subside contentedly into eternal torpor and into disuse of all the faculties which

perpetual struggle exercised; we see those whose delight it has been to strive and toil, cheerfully accept the *rôle* of the eternally unemployed; those whose glory and joy it has been to practise self-denial, denied but one thing—self-denial—and in that privation of their true life and joy made perfectly blessed for ever. This is a transformation for which we are not prepared by anything in the New Testament. It is a transformation, we even venture to affirm, by which the whole spirit of the New Testament prepares us to be staggered and appalled. It seems to us very much the same as talking of annihilation to talk of a missionary going from Africa to a heaven in which spiritual life—his life, his being—is to be so transformed. The sense of spiritual identity in a true missionary's soul would suffer in such a heaven a tremendous shock, if it would not be altogether destroyed. The Christian hero, superannuated for ever from any joy but that of enjoying his own individual blessedness, would hardly, we venture to say, ever know or be himself again. He might say with Thekla's melancholy shade—

> "Hab' ich nicht beschlossen und geendet,
> Hab' ich nicht geliebet und gelebt?"

It may seem, then, even with reference only to what we know of spiritual life here, that we are not without positive knowledge of what it shall be hereafter. But even without attaching undue importance to this, taking it merely as something to

guide our steps to other knowledge, we do not need to torture Scripture, we think, to make it yield more positive information. Without entering minutely into all the questions respecting eternal life, or minutely examining the passages relating to it in the New Testament, we may say we believe that all discussions on the subject have only brought out more fully the great fact that life eternal, as it is spoken of in the Gospels, especially the latest of them, does not mean life begun in eternity, after time, but rather that life which is independent of time and chance and change, which is eternally right and true and good, according to the will of the Eternal. It is thus Christian life under its various aspects of knowledge of God, of love of Christ, of brotherly love, is characterized as life and eternal life. In a word, what we have been calling Christian or spiritual life is declared to be eternal life in the Gospels. Even to those, then, to whom the authority of isolated texts is indispensable or more weighty than that of the general sense and tenor of Scripture, we are able to offer the testimony which they require in confirmation of our views. Self-sacrifice, undoubtedly, is the word which best describes Christian life here. If Christian life is eternal life in any sense, self-sacrifice is eternal. In saying so, we only say eternal life is not temporary. The law of Christian life, about which there can be no mistake, is unmistakably declared to be the law of eternal life. To suppose that the self-sacrifice towards our fellow-creatures

which is so large a part of Christian life here, will have no part in it hereafter, is to make a distinction between Christian life and eternal life, which it seems to be the express object of much of the New Testament to deny. If this be granted, on the same ground on which we *know* anything of a future state at all, we *know* that the state of the blessed dead is one, the nature and the blessedness of which is best expressed in the word self-sacrifice.

We are here, however, met by an objection which seems to bar our way. The state of the "dead in Christ" being one of "blessedness," how, it will be asked, can there be any room for the exercise of self-sacrifice, such, at any rate, as is most conspicuous and most necessary in Christian life here? They hunger no more, neither thirst any more. Materialistic views of the future life give force to this objection. It will have most force with those minds that most distinctly and complacently conceive of heaven as a place cut off by walls and bulwarks from all the rest of the universe—a place in which, as in a field innumerable stalks of corn or barley are seen growing to the same height, all souls are made all alike, and to the same degree blessed for ever. As to heaven being a place, however, a place cut off by walls and bulwarks from the rest of the universe, from every place where there is any evil or any wretchedness, we do not so think of it when we think of angels and saints in glory taking an interest in what is going on in this

world. Again, as to heaven being a place at all, we may, in company with many good and great men, suppose either that it is or that it is not. Suppose it is not a place; suppose, at any rate, it is a state rather than a place, character rather than locality. Suppose the blessed dead not made all alike blessed in one place, the blessedness of which is just to be there, but blessed in proportion to the degree and measure of heavenly, of spiritual life possessed by each — blessedness independent of place. This, at any rate, is conceivable. It is not only conceivable, it is probable, it is certain. It is the measure of faith, truth, love which is in a man that is the measure of his true, his eternal life and blessedness. If this be granted, it expands heaven for the display of self-sacrifice to all immensity and all eternity. Where there is higher and lower, superior and inferior, greater and less, if it be only in one thing, and that thing blessedness, where there is no positive evil or defect of any kind, but only more blessedness and less blessedness, there is room for the everlasting play of self-sacrifice. It is certain a great many people, to whom no one would deny the character of Christian, live exceedingly imperfect Christian lives, and depart from this world with all their Christian imperfections on their head. It is not in going down to the lowest moral strata of society to seek and save the lost and degraded, but rather in intercourse with these imperfect specimens of Christianity, that many a Christian mind of the nobler order has to experi-

ence some of the severest trials to which human nature can be exposed. Nothing (to mention only one set of defects) is harder to put up with than the ignorance, narrowmindedness, conceit, bigotry of many who profess themselves, and no doubt are, Christians. The shrinking of the mind from a heaven in which the society of some Christians we have known and not admired would be inevitable and eternal, has been too widely felt and too energetically uttered to need further expression. It would be easy to collect, in any large centre of population in Christendom, a congregation of Christians, every one of them so ignorant and bigoted that, if you do not exactly say as he says on every conceivable religious topic, he will resent it with anathemas as an affront to God and eternal truth. There is no reason for supposing that all this will be changed by a miracle, so that the least tolerable and tolerant of Christians shall be placed at once in heaven on a par with John the Evangelist and John Locke. If this be so, the objection that there can be no room for self-sacrifice in heaven vanishes. For St. John and John Locke to help some Christians of our own time, even some prominent Church leaders, to rise out of their narrowness and bigotry and bitterness into wider and larger views, into nobler and more gracious life, this would be a work of painful self-sacrifice—painful beyond doubt, but yet glorious and blessed.

The state of the blessed dead, then, we take to be one the blessedness of which is best expressed

in the word self-sacrifice. To this conclusion we had come when we turned aside to notice an objection which might very readily occur, but which when examined vanishes. It is a conclusion which we think supplies a proof of its own correctness and value in two ways, to the consideration of which we devote our remaining space: (1) By the meaning which it lends to much Scripture; (2) By the light which it seems to shed on some problems of human life and destiny.

1. We have already referred to the passage in Corinthians, and shown how, as far as it relates to heaven, its meaning is obvious and definite, if the mystery to which it alludes be understood to be self-sacrifice. Eye hath not seen the beauty of that, ear hath not heard its celestial harmonies; it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive its majesty and glory. God is love. No man hath seen God at any time. But let us take a few passages which refer directly to heaven. Heb. xii, 1, is one passage in which we see, or seem to see, a new, or at any rate a fuller, meaning, if we think of self-sacrifice as the law and the blessedness of heavenly life: "Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us," &c. The great and good of bygone days, our friends and brethren who have gone before us, are not removed in imperturbable serenity of blessedness from the struggles in which others of their kind are now struggling, failing, winning. They

have the blessed pain, by sympathy, of struggling in these struggles, not merely, we may well suppose, of friends and kindred and fellow-Christians, but of mankind. What shame, what wrong, to increase their sympathetic pain, to cloud their sky, to mar their joy, by failure or by turning back.

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." This announcement from the lips of Christ himself cannot be said to have a meaning, if it does not mean that the blessedness of the immortals is self-sacrifice. We may be, we often are, unconcerned as to the spiritual tragedies on which in this world the curtain of the day and night is for ever rising and falling. Of none of these are the angels of God, or "they who through faith and patience inherit the promises," indifferent spectators. While lives are base and miserable, while souls are lost and fatherless, while hearts are crushed and broken here below, heaven is heaven; but there is not the indifference of selfish enjoyment there—there is suspense, watching, sympathy, anxiety. And when it is said truth wins the day, souls are saved, the Captain of salvation has won other victories, there are bursts of joy which could only come from hearts in which suspense and waiting and anxiety are known.

It strikes every reader of the parable of the sheep and the goats, in which the separation of the righteous and the unrighteous is described by our

Lord, that the only righteousness is self-sacrifice, selfishness the only sin. To those on the right hand it is said, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat;" to those on the left, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat." These go away into everlasting punishment, and those into life eternal. To the righteous the invitation is given, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." All this is full of meaning. It cannot be a heaven without self-sacrifice, out of which the selfish are to be kept, and into which the self-sacrificing are invited. It cannot be a selfish heaven which the Father has prepared for the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and for His followers. "Eternal life" for self-sacrificing souls, their eternal reward, cannot be to go away into everlasting selfish enjoyment.

There is a whole class of passages in the apostolic epistles which speak of departed believers as "with the Lord." What these passages tell us is, indeed, as we have seen, according to Dean Alford, all that we know of their state and blessedness. But even if this be all, it is something—it is more than has been thought. A materialistic conception of heaven, according to which the blessedness of believers shall be to be in the same place with Christ, is, to say the least of it, a very poor, if not a monstrous conception. The apostolic phrase lends itself readily, at any rate, to a much wider and nobler conception—that

of Christians participating more and more largely and immediately in Christ's life, sharing His Spirit, entering into His activities. This, in any spiritual sense, must be what it is to be "with the Lord." Community of life, of thought, feeling, action, is spiritual neighbourhood. What, then, do we think of Christ? Not surely as retired from self-sacrifice, not as superannuated in glory from the sympathetic anxiety and sorrow and pain which on earth He bore, nor as ever to be retired from these while man is man. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is not His work alone, but His life, His eternal joy. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Those, therefore, who are spiritually with Him for ever shall for ever work with Him that work of which He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

The meaning which it gives to such passages of Scripture—a meaning in harmony with the whole tenor of Christian revelation—is, we think, one indication of the correctness of the conclusion at which we have arrived as to the nature of heavenly blessedness.

2. We pass on, however, now to observe its bearing upon some of the darker problems of human life and destiny, on which it appears to cast at least a ray of light.

"Nothing," says Pascal, "is so intolerable to a human being as to be in complete rest, without suffering, without occupation, without employment. Then he feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his

insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. Irrepressibly there must issue from the bottom of his soul ennui, gloom, sadness, chagrin, disgust, despair." One of the problems of human destiny is that occupation for immortal souls, the want of which Pascal in this forcible passage seems to indicate would make a hell of heaven. On this problem our view of heaven as self-sacrifice throws some light. Supposing not place but character to be heaven, we have no difficulty in supposing, we have insuperable difficulty in not supposing, the heaven of noble Christian souls who have lived and toiled and suffered for and with others all their Christian life, to be not "complete rest," but rather leave, scope, room, still to do the same, still to strive and toil, and find in doing this, it may be, something of old anxiety and pain, but ever also new, and deeper, and truer, and diviner joy.

To be any more explicit than this, to suppose any cases of noble Christian life thus eternally prolonged and eternally blessed, is very likely to run some risk of being misunderstood. But accepting even this risk in our anxiety to say what we mean, we have not far to look for instances which will serve our turn. Much eloquence has been expended on celestial studies and celestial students. Much has been said of the delight of eternally pursuing knowledge of God's works and ways. It is not difficult to suppose something more blessed and more heavenly even than this delight. There are Christians who, with all the advantages of genius

or high talents, of exceptional culture and experience, have been all their lives students of divine truth, and whose strongest personal craving must ever be to pursue the study of it further. It is not difficult to imagine some such, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, checking the desire for knowledge, bending themselves heroically to the task of tutoring less gifted or less enlightened, perhaps utterly heathen souls, in divine science, and finding eternally in this a deeper blessedness than the loftiest attainments in knowledge of man or seraph could ever yield.

So again we can imagine—and here we speak with even more confidence, as from the ground of universal and imperishable humanity—we can imagine the interrupted, or neglected, or unsuccessful task of Christian parents in time resumed in eternity. It costs us no effort of the imagination, and certainly conflicts with no part of Christian revelation that we know of, to suppose a mother, whose duty to a child has been ill or unsuccessfully performed, finding in all eternity a real but blessed toil in the endeavour to reach the ends contemplated in that unaccomplished duty.

It becomes every day more intolerable for the Christian mind to entertain the notion of the general or universal perdition of the heathen. Commerce and science together impress us more and more with their enormous numbers; Christianity deepens our sense of brotherhood with them all, and, consequently, of the Father's part in them;

and the more impossible therefore it becomes almost daily even for the severest type of Christian mind to accept the verdict in their case—all lost. It becomes, therefore, on the other hand, every day the easier to suppose the missionaries and philanthropists, the Xaviers and Moffats, of all time and all lands, not superannuated in a blessedness foreign to all their earthly experience, but in never-ending toil experiencing a never-ending joy.

Instances like these, not difficult to imagine, are suggestive of reflections bearing on the problem of that occupation for our moral energies, without which heaven would be for Pascal, and all such souls, a place of ennui, of chagrin, of darkness, and despair.

Problems remain which are not to be lightly handled, but on which we may venture to say a ray of light seems to be cast on the supposition that we judge rightly the nature of the heavenly blessedness. One, the greatest of all, we may here glance at for a moment—the problem of the lost. It is the less inexcusable to advert to this subject that it has not always escaped rough treatment at the hands of ignorant or bigoted speculation, and especially that it has not been always put in a light as regards the joys of the redeemed at all pleasing or satisfactory to a humane mind. With regard to lost souls, it is certainly the idea in many minds, fostered by many writers, that, being seen to be righteously outcast and deserted and punished,

they are no concern of the blessed. Either they are forgotten, or their fate excites no curiosity or compassion. The wife, whose last word was for her husband a word of blessing and undying love, remembers him no more. In death converted David and (let us suppose it) unconverted Jonathan are not only divided, but estranged or oblivious of earthly ties. The mother forgets in heaven, who could not forget on earth, the child she bore. Benevolent souls, that were tortured here by the thought of souls being lost, in heaven are unconcerned—they are finally at ease in Zion. When there is danger only of souls being lost, Christians can scarcely breathe for anguish; when the loss is certain, when it is known, they recover their composure, they tune their harps, and adore and glorify God for their own salvation. Somehow all this just about as little commends itself to our minds as the more antique and happily antiquated representations of the redeemed bending over the battlements of heaven to derive, from the sight of the tortures of the damned and the hearing of their cries, access to their own unmeasured joy. All this, though it has found its way into the common mind in Christendom, cannot maintain itself even there. Every motion of the spirit of Christ in Christian communities, every advance of religious thought, every revival of religious feeling, withers it as with fire. We do not speak here of the recovery of the lost. But suppose even we hold that the lost are eternally lost, or altogether refuse

to discuss the question, there is, at any rate, another view which we can take of the redeemed than that they are indifferent to their fate. It ought not to be, and will not be, difficult for any humane Christian mind to imagine the blessed, urged by an irresistible Christ-like tenderness and pity and love, lavishing upon the lost, even if it be to no purpose, their tenderness and pity and love; pleading, wrestling, agonizing with them, to win them from the outer darkness of their selfishness and alienation to the eternal light and eternal love in Christ and God. We have no difficulty in supposing the wish of father, brother, friend, of apostle, martyr, confessor, saint, to be in heaven what was the wish of one on earth—to be accursed from Christ for his brethren's sake. Here love toils gloriously on at many a profitless and, indeed, hopeless task, and finds its own good and glory in it. So, for that matter, it may be hereafter. All that we say is, that we can conceive, and, for reasons that have already been assigned, are in fact bound to conceive, of redeemed souls, not as dwelling apart in imperturbable enjoyment, but rather as thus, with overflowing love and sympathy and self-sacrifice, toiling at the task, be it even profitless and hopeless, of bettering the worse lot of others. God himself is, and as He changes not, always will be, kind even to the evil and unthankful. Those who are his by community of spirit and life, will not even in eternity be found unkind or indifferent to the unthankful because they are also evil.

If not much light be thus thrown—it is not our object to do so here—on the state of the lost, some we think is thrown upon that of the blessed dead, or, at any rate, some conceptions of it which it is important to correct are shown to need correction. Substituting for the representations of heaven which have been commonly accepted self-sacrifice as its law and blessedness, wide views of human life and destiny, we think, are opened up to us. This is the case, in the first place, as regards Christian perfection—development of the individual man. In most representations of the heavenly state we start with perfection, and have therefore no moral or spiritual goal. We start from the goal. We are made perfect at once in holiness and happiness. But that perfection, which is thus put on as a wedding-garment at the gates of heaven, is obviously imperfect, one-sided. Its definition is holiness in the sense of mere freedom from sin, mere absence of evil. It is perfection of another kind, the definition of which is supplied by the life and death of Christ, and of which He gives us the measure in his sermon on the mount. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is an exhortation which does not refer immediately to the precepts of the sermon as to not being or doing evil, but to those which relate to being and doing good—blessing them that curse us, doing good to them that hate us. This is the reference of the injunction on one side; on the other, with equal significance, it refers to Him who has just been

declared to be kind to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. Christ's "perfection," to speak both of his life and his teaching, lay not in not being or doing evil, but, above all, in being and doing good—in charity, not innocence; in a word, in self-sacrifice. In this, as in all other perfection; in this above all, one alone is or can be perfect. In regard to "holiness," mere freedom from sin, it may be different; but, in regard to goodness, love, self-sacrifice, all created beings in time and eternity can only be at the most strivers after perfection. In that view of the state of the blessed dead, for which we have been contending, we find exactly that theatre for this striving which the case demands; we behold the creature, among his fellows, striving after the ultimate perfection of the Creator—God is love—and in that striving never successful, but never baffled, eternally blessed, ennobled, glorified. We catch here a wonderful glimpse of that reconcilement of all antagonisms which it is the glory of the cross to have accomplished or prepared—self and self-sacrifice, eternally harmonized in the presence of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Again, if the conceptions which have been suggested as to the blessedness of heaven be entertained, they open wide views of the development of the race, and of moral satisfactions and moral victories connected with that development. We have already remarked that the common representations of the heavenly state present no prospect

of a career to man as a moral being, no field for the exercise of his moral energies. They reduce, or rather elevate, all souls to a dead-level of blessedness which rejects sympathy, and of perfection which scorns labour. Our pass-word, self-sacrifice, opens heaven under another and totally different aspect. Eternity, according to our view of heaven, will have its history as well as time. As on earth, the richest and brightest and heavenliest rooms in our Father's house are those into which they have pressed who have passed into them through dens and caves of the earth, not pursuing their own good, but the good of others ; they who, with many a day of anxiety and toil and sympathetic pain, have turned darkness into light, sorrow into rejoicing, evil into good, in the lot of others; so the most enraptured moments and the best rooms in the house of many mansions, will be those in which the toil and sympathy and anxiety of holier and more loving souls, their eternal struggling and striving, is rewarded with the knowledge of increase of good, increase of love in other souls, in which it is announced that again something has been hardly and toughly won from the kingdom of darkness for the kingdom of light. We do not, we say again, speak here of the recovery of the lost. We do not speak of there being joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth in the sense that would be attached to the words in the present connection. But eternity will have a history like time, a history

not of fixed misery here and motionless enjoyment there, but of moral enterprise and divine self-sacrifice, on the one hand, always scaling nobler heights, and darkness and imperfection always shrinking into narrower vales. In the course of that history, events will transpire, achievements will occur, victories will be won, by which new raptures will be made to thrill through heavenly bosoms, and new hosannas to echo through heavenly places. While we are apt to be discouraged by some present aspects of the religious world, we look to the kingdom of God of the unbounded future, and see not only churches, but nations that have never yet heard the Gospel, entering into it, and bringing with them, as spoils of victory over the decaying kingdom of darkness, fresh glory and fresh blessedness to the realms of light. These are some of the views of human life and destiny which present themselves when, at the word self-sacrifice, at the sign of the cross, we see heaven opened.

A larger view of human life, we remark in conclusion, than that which is commonly expressed in calling it a state of probation, is suggested by all this. Eternity is a state of rewards and punishments. So is time. But neither of them is that alone. The present state of things is an education; the future will be that also; both an endless development of the human spirit in true, and, above all, self-sacrificing life. It is the key to the riddle of human history, to all this otherwise unintelligible world. It is the explanation of all

the perplexing contrasts of human existence, past and present, poverty and riches, east and west, barbarism and civilization, health and sickness, evil and good, that they serve to individualize, to differentiate human beings so as to give scope eternally for self-sacrifice. Different ages, different races, different creeds give us different men, in order that differences and antagonisms, and with them that which reconciles them all, the spirit of self-sacrifice in Christ, may not fail eternally. Earth has an infinite variety of spiritual climates and soils, that humanity, transplanted to the one climate and the one soil of the invisible and eternal, may retain an infinite variety, and in that variety a paradise for all self-sacrificing souls, and for God whose life they share. Evil exists that good may grow strong by conquering it; selfishness, the root and stem of all evil, that self-sacrifice may never lack a duty and a reward. Sin, the divider between man and man, and between man and God, shall be, through Christ, the eternal bond of human brotherhood and human blessedness. And thus we understand how the least shall be the greatest. Often, among the lowly and the poor in spirit, among the "nobodies" of society and the least esteemed in churches—not among the mighty of society or the leaders of Christian sects—the lesson of self-sacrifice has been well learned on earth, proficiency in which is true, is heavenly, greatness and glory and blessedness. Thus, too, we understand the meaning of the words, "Blessed

are the dead which die in the Lord ; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours : and their works do follow them." Every man's work follows him, every man's work is his reward. But alone in the blessed work of self-sacrifice is there final rest, that rest in congenial and perpetual activity which is the true life of man. They that have done that work, and whom that work follows, will rest in heaven, not in eternal idleness, but in much and blessed toil, and the more they have done on earth, the greater to all eternity will be their capacity for that toil, and for the blessedness which attends it.

It will be said, no doubt, that in all this we assume, imagine, think, suppose, much more than we prove. And we have little to answer to this objection, except that we have only been anxious to show that, on the same ground on which we *know* that there is a future state at all, we *know* that the law, and the blessedness of it, will be self-sacrifice, and not what common representations of it appear to indicate.

The tone of our remarks, perhaps, needs more apology than the argument which they present. It is, we confess, little in keeping with the majesty of the theme. But we have been obliged to keep in view, not so much heaven, the unseen glory, as certain pictures of it which adorn the galleries of religious art, and our remarks have therefore taken naturally a critical turn. So much the easier, however, will it be to detect any fallacies which they

may contain, and to give them the answer which they crave, not from isolated texts, but from the general tenor of divine revelation, and the witness of the Spirit in Christian character and experience.

It will be seen that we do not, in any of our observations, travel away from the ground of Scripture, and the ordinarily received doctrines of Christianity, to the ground of philosophy. We have used terms like "self-sacrifice" in a popular sense, and without attempting philosophical definitions. We have not discussed the being of a God, the existence of a future state, or the authenticity of the Gospels. Our object, as we have before said, has been to meet common notions, which we believe to be common mistakes, on their own ground. Apart altogether from their exact theological character, simply as common, and therefore influential, the peculiar views of heaven to which we have referred have an importance which, whether it is deplored or not, is at any rate unquestionable. It seemed therefore important, as it certainly seemed easy, to oppose them on their own ground.

If it be objected by some, who in the main agree with our theory of another life, that, in substance it cannot but be familiar to many thoughtful minds, our reply must be that the theory to which it is an answer is certainly more familiar to ordinary minds. Whether our theory of another life be correct or not, it is certain, we may add, the theory of

Christian life on which it rests cannot be false. It is true with regard to the present world, if not with regard to the next, that charity is the bond of perfectness, self-sacrifice the law of true life and blessedness. If our theory of another life have any truth in it, it is important for this life that as much truth as there may be in it should be generally inculcated in place of much which comes at present from the pulpit and the religious press. The future, or our conception of it, as we have before remarked, is important to our present happiness. Our view of the future is important also to our present conduct. No doubt it is, first of all, a selfish earth which makes a selfish heaven; but there is a reflex action, and a selfish heaven makes a selfish earth. As long as materialistic views of heaven give currency to the notion that, in heaven, all that was of earth—distinctions of mind, character, life—are obliterated in a uniform perfection and a monotonous blessedness, so long will the belief prevail that it is very much the same what a man's life is up to the last moment, if, only just before that, his sins are pardoned and his entrance into the abode of the blessed secured. On the other hand our theory of a future life, if it be accepted, obviously leads to the conclusion that no action of our present lives is unimportant in respect to the eternity which is to follow. It is true, it will probably be objected by many, that we seem, in adopting any such theory, to declare the possibility of changes in the condition both of the good and of the evil which

have been commonly pronounced to be impossible, and therefore directly encourage people to live now as if the issues of their life might be set aside or modified in the life to come. But the answer to this objection, we think, is not to assert the eternal immobility of existence in the next world, but the eternity of the issues of our actions in this world. Our lives are fleeting, but our momentary acts are eternal. They live in that which is eternal in us. As regards sin, the wages is death—even if it be pardoned. God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Not mere immortality, on the one hand, any more than mere bodily corruption on the other. He that soweth to the flesh reaps in the spirit propensity to evil; importunity of the lower nature, in which there is the terrible force and vitality of spirit. He that soweth to the Spirit, shall reap in spiritual power and faculty, in capacity for and enjoyment of life, true life, eternal life. The spiritual theory which we have advanced of another life, if it implies change in eternity, rests upon the eternity of all that goes on in time.

III.

PROFIT AND LOSS.

"What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"—Matthew xvi, 26.

THE word here translated soul is, in the verse immediately preceding this, twice translated life—"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." We have to remember this in order to avoid putting a false meaning into this great question, and giving to it a mistaken point. We have to remember that here the soul and the life are not different, as the different translation of successive verses would make them appear; that what is here meant by soul is not that something in man which is supposed to be immaterial and immortal, but it is life in a general sense, and we may of course add, specially that higher life of faith and goodness which is man's true life. The question is not, "What is the profit if a man is a gainer in this world, and then a loser in the next; a loser because the immortal part is lost?" It is, "What

profit is it, what good is it, if a man exists and yet does not truly live; gains anything or everything outside of himself, and in himself, though he can be rich nowhere else, is naked and destitute? "

A hundred mysterious and perplexing questions which have been raised about the soul—whether it exists at all, whether it is immaterial, whether it is immortal, how it can inhabit a material frame—are answered or emptied of their meaning, at least for our present purpose, when we take the word in this sense, when we regard the thing in this light.

The New Testament is a collection of writings about the soul. But there is not one argument in the whole collection to prove that men have souls, or one disquisition to show what souls are. Just as Christ and his apostles assume that men have bodies, they take for granted that they have souls. They have the same way of proving the existence of the soul as of proving the existence of the body, or of a material world, and that is by not proving it at all, but taking it for granted.

What our Lord does to show that we have a soul and to show what the soul is, is not to discuss these points as a philosopher would do, but to exhibit life which is that of the soul.

In fact the Bible is one long demonstration of the same thing by the same method. What we call Revelation is more than anything a revelation of the soul, of man's higher life. As far as the Bible

is history it is the history of a nation whose national life is not intellectual like that of Athens, not political like that of Rome, but the life of the soul. It is the history of a nation whose great men are great, not in virtue of birth, or literary genius, or public station, but in virtue of faith and goodness. It is the history of a nation whose great epochs and events are not those in which fortune or misfortune has occurred in trade or diplomacy or war, in which a battle has been lost or won, a king elected or dethroned, but in which man's higher life has prospered or suffered eclipse, God has been served or Baal worshipped. As far as the Bible is history it is the history, not of mind, but of soul; not of politics, but of religion; and it is so because it is the history of a nation whose strange destiny it was to be a sort of spiritual and religious stage for all the world—their national life a kind of religious drama or miracle play for all mankind.

As history, the Bible is the history of the soul; as a record of individual experience and as a repository of ideas, it is the same. When you have described the outward condition and circumstances of men like Abraham, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, you have done almost nothing to describe the men. It was not because, though by origin a Chaldean shepherd, Abraham had a sort of princely rank and station assigned to him in the countries where he sojourned, that Abraham is what he is in the Bible story. David would hardly have been a less memorable figure in the

Bible if he had remained to the end of his days a shepherd on the plains of Bethlehem, and never filled an uneasy seat upon the throne of Israel. These men lived a life which was too grand and too lofty to be affected, except in the most superficial manner, by accidents of fortune, by the extremes of poverty or splendour. That life which David described in the 23rd Psalm—a life full of interest, variety, sweetness, grandeur; a life above sense, beyond the visible; a life on the shores of which there heaved always the vast ocean of the eternal truth and goodness and power and glory—that life, and not the life which he led at one time in the fields, another time in the camp, now in a shepherd's cottage, now in a king's palace, was his true life. It was the life, not of the body or of the intellect, but of the soul.

As history and as biography, the Bible is a record of man's higher life. As a repository of truth and doctrine it is the same. The Bible, in all its variety—not in spite of its variety, but in virtue of it—is an exhibition, on an immense scale, of man's higher life in all its moods and phases, in its failures and reverses, its heroism and its commonplace, its poetry and its prose. In the Gospel, that which is exhibited in all the Bible is exhibited in its last and total perfection. Christ's life is the soul, the higher life of man, translated into the visible language of fact. Ask me what soul is, and what is its worth, and if I have to speak of it as a philosopher, I am lost in

a thousand perplexities, I can give but the most ambiguous and uncertain answers to a thousand questions. But as one concerned about the life and well-being of humanity, I have little difficulty or doubt; I have but to say, Consider that life of Jesus of Nazareth, how absolute its poverty, how utterly unattractive on the score of what belongs to mere intellect and taste, as well as of what belongs to rank and affluence, yet how rich and glorious in something else, and something grander and better! No life so poor and mean as that, no life so naked of all outward adornment, yet none either so majestic or at the same time so blessed! He who lived that life had meat to eat which his lowly peasant life did not afford, and which no princely or imperial fortune could have procured him. In that communion which he perpetually enjoyed with an unseen Father, the Eternally Good and Righteous, in that supreme desire to save and bless which was His meat and drink, He lived a life which, if you mean by life not mere existence, unconscious, as of a vegetable, or dull, as of a grazing ox, but variety and depth and grandeur of feeling and purpose and experience—if this is what you mean by life; if one hour of crowded life is worth an age without a name—He lived a life in Nazareth, in Capernaum, in Bethany, Gethsemane, Jerusalem, which makes all other life appear in comparison but variety of death. It is this life which He lived of which we speak when we speak of soul. Ask me how I know

that soul exists, how its existence is to be proved, what its worth is, I answer all these questions by saying, It is that true, that perfect life of man which was lived upon the earth by one man, Christ Jesus, and is to be lived again by us.

It is when we understand this—it is when we remember that the soul is man's higher life, the divine life which is exhibited in Christ, that we see the exact force and meaning of this question—"What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What is the good of having anything outward to himself, even suppose it were the whole world, if he is himself nothing, if his true life as a man is not exercised and enjoyed?

In order to bring out the force of this question we might ask a similar one with regard to many things of more or less importance,—bodily life, for example, a nation, a university, a church. Suppose a man cut off from all, or almost all, that affords pleasure to the senses, suppose him rendered blind and deaf and dumb, suppose him stricken with paralysis in all his limbs and faculties, we can imagine in such a case life continued, but we might well ask what is the use or profit of it, all that makes life a blessing having been struck out of it.

Or, in place of bodily life, think of that of a great nation like our own. Suppose we became so corrupted by the love of money or the love of pleasure as to forfeit our rank and influence as a

people—suppose all that has given this country power and glory to have ceased—suppose that, instead of planting civilization in distant continents, we let all our institutions and agencies for educating and elevating our own race fall into disuse and decay—suppose we became a nation of shopkeepers and vulgar pleasure-seekers—you might well say, What though such a nation grows richer and richer, what though its commerce extends from year to year, what though its resources never fail, what good is there in its existence, what sort of national life is this, and what is the profit of it, with all that is really great and good, all that is noble and stirring, for ever departed from it?

Or suppose again you had a University like this,* founded in a remote age to foster learning and the arts, to be a centre of intellectual light, and a focus of moral influence, to be in fact a corporate teacher and live a teacher's life, to perform long beyond the three score years and ten of our mortal term a teacher's duties, to be crowned with a teacher's glory—suppose that you had such an institution, and that you found it grown forgetful of the ends for which it was founded, anxious only to collect its rents from old property, zealous only to husband or increase its revenues, and suppose that you found it attaining these ends, rich and despised, endowed and useless, its history become not a record of splendid intellectual achievement, but of dull and plodding avarice, you might well ask, What is the

* This sermon was preached before the University of Glasgow.

use or profit to such an institution of wealth, of fine buildings, of increasing revenues, if this is all for which it exists?

It is in this way that the question of my text is asked—it is not, What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and his gain be counterbalanced by the pains of hell? it is this more direct and searching question, What is the good of life to us if we do not live? what is the profit of being a man in form and not a man in fact? what is the worth of existence if its worth is all, or, for the most part, outside of us and not in us?

There are two remarks which might be made in illustration of this question, in the sense in which I take it.

I. The gain here spoken of is nominal, imaginary.

II. The loss is real and it is the greatest conceivable.

I. I shall only have time here to say a few words with regard to the latter point. As to the former I will only say, that to lose the soul, not to live man's higher life, is really also to lose the world, whether you mean by it the material world, or the activities and pleasures of human life. It is only in an imaginary, entirely illusory way that any man who loses his soul gains the world.

We gain as much of the world as really enriches us, really enters in the shape of thought and feeling into the current of our existence, really affords us unmixed and enduring satisfaction, and we gain

no more of the world than this. We have of the world not what we call our own, but what we are able to enjoy and no more. It is not to gain the world, to gain riches which can buy anything the world contains, unless you can buy along with it the power to enjoy it. Thus rich men gain the whole world and do not gain it at all. They can procure for themselves almost everything the world contains; travel where they will, and behold its wonders and its beauties; call to themselves from its deepest mines their jewels; from its farthest shores their luxuries. Thus they gain the whole world. Yet, after all, such men very often do not gain it all: they gain less of it than most men. Their fine wines and costly dainties do not afford them more, probably they afford them far less, pleasure than the coarsest fare, eaten with unfailing relish, gives to a healthy day-labourer. As for other enjoyments, such men have often very few, or none. They have no delight in books, no interest in public affairs, no zest for amusements. They have gained the world, and do not possess it. Their world is almost the poorest conceivable. It does not enrich them. It does not occupy their affections, or fill up their idle hours; it does not lend stir or variety or charm or value to their existence.

Cultivate and expand the mind: in proportion as you do so, though your fortunes remain stationary, you gain the world. Narrow the mind, or leave it in ignorance and darkness, and in the same proportion you circumscribe your world. An

uneducated peasant, whose day is divided by his meals, his years by payment of his wages, whose ideas are never increased beyond a very small number connected with these things and with the place in which he lives—give him the world and it is no gain to him; to him it is a poor world, empty of all but a few, and those few most sorry delights and satisfactions. On the other hand, an educated man may be poor—the inhabitant of a garret or of a cottage; but the world which exists for him, in which he lives, is rich and spacious. In the observation of nature, in the study of books, above all in the study of man, he finds deep, unfailing delights. The seas which break on the shores of other lands, the storms that sweep over them, the streams that flow through them, the people who inhabit them, are all full of interest to him, and possess him and are possessed by him. In comparison with that of a man devoid of intellectual life, his world is one full of a thousand various pleasures, and occupations, and possessions.

But just as without a measure of intellectual cultivation you cannot really or largely gain the world, so much more you cannot really gain it without soul, without living man's higher life. Mere mental culture by itself has its pains and drawbacks, as well as its pleasures and satisfactions. Thus, it has happened that many a man of fine intellect and fine culture has not only not gained riches, but—a different thing—has not gained the

world; has missed all its common and uncommon enjoyments; instead of subjecting the universe to the command of an imperial brain, has been but "lord of himself, that heritage of woe." Without something higher and better than even intellect and mental culture and activity, you cannot gain the world, except in a poor and illusory manner. Only if you have the soul to scorn delights and live laborious days, not for fame but for the good of others, to spend riches and health and intellect and life, not in ministering to selfish tastes, be they either fine or coarse, but in doing good, helping others to be better and happier, in being to them a minister of the things which God has given you, and a herald to them of the glad tidings of God's love, and man's fellow-feeling and charity;—only if you have such a soul can you truly gain the world, enjoy its best, purest, most various, and abundant pleasures and satisfactions, and also have the sting taken out of its worst trials and afflictions. The luxury of doing good in the love of goodness, of giving rather than receiving, is the best and richest which the world affords. It was a luxury to enjoy which the Son of man advised one whom He loved well, one who had gained the world and had large possessions, to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, and come and follow Him.

The gain here spoken of, then, is illusory.

II. The loss is real and immense.

In the first place, the soul is lost by not being

exercised. Life which is not effort, growth, increase, is not life at all; it is life lost.

All men have souls, all men are gifted with capacities greater or less for higher life than that of the flesh or of the mere intellect, else would they not be men at all. But there are whole nations and peoples, and those the largest in the world, forming vastly more than half of the human race, among whom this higher life can hardly be said to manifest itself, except as a possibility. The Gospel of Christ, our Christian civilization, has called it forth, to some extent, among ourselves; but as for these nations they have yet to hear that there is a gospel.

What shall we say of the heathen millions of our race in this position? Shall we say that because they have been denied what is necessary to call forth any or much of man's higher life, they are to be adjudged in some deathless part to unending punishment in the world to come? Human nature, not to say enlightened Christian reason, shudders at the suggestion as a blasphemy.

Well, but if the heathen, who never heard of Jesus Christ, are not to be condemned on that account to eternal punishment—if their souls are not in that sense lost—the question arises, Is there any loss at all on their part, and, if so, what? Is it any misfortune, in that case, if they never hear the Gospel? They cannot be condemned, their souls cannot be lost, for never having heard the Gospel. In case souls should be lost among

them if Christianity were taught them, were it not better not to teach them Christianity?

My answer, of course, is, Souls are not in danger of being lost when they are without such light as we enjoy. They *are* lost. There is no contingency in the matter. Where man's higher life has not been called forth, the loss is not what may be, but what is—it is condemnation and death. Only compare a savage of any country with a Christian of your own land, and see if the loss is nothing or little.

I speak of the heathen abroad, because what is to be said of them has its application at home. There are millions in this country whom, though their deeds are wicked, and their years are many, we ought not to regard as base and wicked men, but as spiritual infants or idiots. They are heathen. This is all we know of them, except that we know also that their loss is unspeakable. Issue from some home, not of luxury, but of Christian purity and enlightenment, and peace, and find your way into one of the lanes and alleys of this great city, where life is not what it ought to be, but is what you might expect it to be, low life, lane-and-alley life, heathen life, and say, as you compare what you have just left with what you see, whether, apart altogether from hell, it is no loss to lose the soul, to know nothing of man's true, man's higher life.

It is not only where people have never heard the Gospel, or where every influence for good is counteracted by a hundred more constant and more

powerful influences for evil, that there is little of man's higher life to be seen. There is too little of it among Christian congregations.

And one reason for this which I may venture to suggest is that Christian churches, as they are organized and as they are used, do not always serve to cultivate and call forth man's higher life. It may even be alleged, I think, and with some truth, that they often serve an opposite purpose. It does not contribute to my bodily health and well-being to spend my time in fingering my pulse to see if it beats regularly, and in grasping the muscles of my arm to discover whether they are firm and sound. Use the body, exercise your limbs, observe the laws which govern the use of your physical nature and you will thus best secure its health and soundness.

In the same way it does not save the soul to entertain, as many do, a constant and worrying anxiety as to the soul. Use the soul, exercise your higher life, and you will thus save the soul, thus promote your higher life.

This is a truth which many who frequent churches, and not a few who teach in churches, have yet to learn. When people meet together twice on Sunday to engage in worship, and to hear a sermon; when they do so with the view of attending to the soul, and saving the soul, the result, no doubt, is or ought to be, that their minds come to be well informed as to the theory of man's higher life, but it does not follow that

there is any awakening or development of that higher life itself. Often the mind wakes, the soul sleeps. The man is cheated. He intended, perhaps, to become a good man; he becomes a pedant in certain selected and assorted Scriptures. So far indeed from its always promoting man's higher life to use churches as many use them, it has very often exactly the opposite effect. If it issues, as it often does, in a man's whole concern and anxiety being about his own soul, in his saying to his soul, "Soul, art thou safe? soul, is thy everlasting bread and water sure? soul, hast thou much goods laid up for another world?"—if this is what comes of going to church and hearing innumerable sermons, I think it may be contended that churches, instead of saving souls, help so far to facilitate their loss. For all this, I was going to say, is disguised selfishness; but it is not disguised, it is open and palpable. To be concerned, to be consumed with anxiety, about truth and goodness, and faith and love, which are man's true life—this is a noble passion, one which makes a man a man indeed. But to be concerned merely or mainly about escape from punishment in the world to come —this is not salvation, but selfishness. There is a sense, in which we may literally say—He that saveth his soul shall lose it, and he that loseth his soul shall save it.

What our churches need to do to cultivate our higher life is to convert themselves, to a large extent, from schools for expounding it into

societies for practising it. Let members of Christian churches, instead of philosophizing one day in the week about the soul, begin to show that they have a soul; let them exercise it every day, exercise it in the brotherhood of the Christian body, for the good, not of the Church, but of the world—let them do this, and then, instead of Christians being so hard to distinguish on week days from other people, we shall know them by their adding to their faith, virtue and patience and charity and all nobleness.

I remark, in the second place, that the soul is lost when it is perverted and corrupted.

It is perverted and corrupted in the sphere of the lower life.

In this sphere souls are doubly lost, as a citadel for which contending armies strive for weeks and months is doubly lost when those who ought to hold it are driven out and those who ought not to hold it enter in. They are lost as a friend is lost who becomes a foe; they are lost as guns are lost in battle when they are turned upon their retreating owners.

When, instead of a man having passions and commanding them, passions possess the man and command him, all human life, all higher life is lost; it is gradually or rapidly narrowed, curtailed, darkened, debased, emptied of its worth and value. That temptation which is represented as having imposed upon Adam and Eve; which was presented to Christ, but did not impose upon Him;

the temptation to seek wider, deeper, more intense and thrilling experience of life in the way of indulgence of sensual passions, in the way of taking a step downwards from the highest manhood; that temptation is still whispered in every human ear, and in every human heart. Sin, eat of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. Cast away moral restraint, checks of conscience, early principles of rectitude, and then, behold, from the high mountain of opening manhood, all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them—all these are yours. It is the fiend who whispers it. All this is the grossest of delusions. Instead of life becoming wider and fuller in this way, its horizon continually contracts, its kingdoms and its glory miraculously collapse.

We see this where something of the higher life of man has once been actually awakened. If, for example, a youth who has had the happiness to be born and trained in a Christian household, and has profited by its influences, so as to give promise of a noble and a happy future—if such a youth, when he leaves home and assumes the government of his own course in life, forgets his father's counsel and his mother's entreaty, enters the broad instead of the narrow way, courts temptation instead of shunning it, gives a loose rein to passion,—if he does this, and having done it, returns to the home of his early days, he returns, no doubt with larger experience, he has seen the world and life, but

with what result? Not to say that perhaps he is less sincere and less affectionate than he once was, the effect of his experience is that the simple pleasures of home no longer please him; he can no longer, as he used to do, find books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything; no longer in vacant hours be sufficient to himself and to his happiness; no longer believe as he did in innocence or purity, in unbending rectitude, in parental love. And in all this, not to speak of the fact that his very pleasures are but varieties of pain, he has not surely gained, but immeasurably lost. With the loss of higher life, which his experience of evil has cost him, all life has lost its bloom and freshness and glory. The old story has been retold of the Paradise in which man was placed, and out of which for his transgression he was driven.

It is an ingenious, but yet a just, remark which has been made by the author of *Gifts for Men* with regard to our Lord's story of the prodigal son, that his language, even when he came to himself, even the language of his penitence, is that of unbelief, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." The emptiness of his own nature emptied to him even his father's heart of all its wealth of tenderness and pity and love.

The soul is perverted in the sphere of the lower life. It is more important, perhaps, to remark that it is perverted and corrupted in its own sphere.

Where will you find a picture of human nature in which there is less to love than that which you have in the Gospel of those to whom Christ came, and who received Him not—those sanctimonious infidels and perfidious saints of whom Christ spoke with a scorn which, as it came from Him and was reserved for them, we must regard as terrible?

If ever souls were utterly lost in this world they were the souls of those to whom John the Baptist said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the condemnation of hell."

It reminds us that souls are perverted in their own sphere—perverted not only by passion but by religion. What is the effect of religious instruction and religious observances among ourselves in many cases? Not that men become more manly, women more womanly; not that church people become enlightened, sincere, generous, magnanimous, brotherly, sympathetic, beyond what is common. On the very ground of religion there are many, who, instead of loving more than others, hate more, and hate more bitterly than others; who despise natural goodness without attaining any that is supernatural; who, because they must be saints and meet for heaven, do not think it worth while to be just and true and good in their daily life; who differ with neighbours and kinsfolk about a doctrine or a rite, and regard them as Samaritans and heathen; who are members of a sect or party, and will use any means to further its ends and confound its enemies.

Here we have not the higher life at its highest, but all that is truly great and good and noble mercilessly extirpated from the soil of human nature. If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness! If your religion is false, where can you be in contact with truth? Souls lost through passion often keep a mysterious reserve of goodness in which there is hope. It is not so where religion is not love, but sect and party, selfishness, spiritual pride, bigotry; where religion, instead of demolishing every wall of partition between man and man, and between man and God, erects new barriers and new divisions. Man's higher life of faith and goodness is here under a double curse—it is cut off at once from nature and from grace, it is severed at once from the world and God, it has neither pagan health nor Christian beauty, neither natural bloom nor spiritual glory. It is doubly lost, because instead of leading straight to, it leads straight from that point where man is united with man in sympathy and love, and men are united to God; that point where in Christ all things are reconciled to God, and God in his life of love is all in all.

It is easy, I remark in conclusion, to exhaust the world and life in all directions but one. This is easy even for the few on whom the choicest gifts of fortune and the rarest gifts of person and of intellect have been bestowed. We ought indeed, perhaps, to pity, as among the poorest and most forlorn of their race, many a fine lady and gentle-

man lolling indolently in a carriage, going about fussily from shop to shop, hasting from town to country and from country to town, posting from home abroad, trying to add to the stock of one day's, or one month's, or one year's stale enjoyments by a vain endeavour to escape from themselves.

As for the great mass of men, they are by their very condition denied all, or almost all, that makes life attractive, beautiful, enjoyable. Their dull round of drudgery, privation, hardship, beginning in an unnoticed birth to end in an unheeded death, excludes the rich man's comforts, and still more the sweet solace, and the pure delights connected with mental cultivation.

Even much study itself is a weariness of the flesh. There are moments when the poet, the orator, the thinker, possessed, inspired with lofty and burning thoughts, needs nothing added to the riches of his existence; finds life glorious and sublime. But these are but moments even in the life of genius, and after them and around them stretches the weary waste of uninspired, inglorious, untuneful days and years.

As we think of all this, we are tempted to say—Surely every man walketh in a vain show; they are disquieted in vain. Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance they are altogether lighter than vanity. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Yet after all this is not the truth. It is not the highest

truth, but the deepest falsehood with regard to human life; it is the devil's most immoral and most wicked whisper. It is the utterance, not of perfect loyalty to the Father of All, but of rank rebellion against heaven. Other life is vain—man's true life is not vanity, nor vexation of spirit. For all men, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, for the drudge toiling in darkness in a mine, for those whose labours are in the lofty fields of science, there is a life possible, not remote, far off, unnatural, but their own life, man's true life, life of faith and goodness, Christ's life in the unseen and eternal, from which vanity is remote, to which vexation cannot come, in which the rich find the true use of riches, the learned and gifted of their gifts, the poor an untold wealth in poverty, all men the grandeur, worth, sacredness of this mortal existence. Learn from Christ and by his grace to live not for self but for others; live not to do your own will but God's; count it your meat and drink to clothe the naked and to feed the hungry; think little to-day of self and less to-morrow; whether you are poor or rich, let other men's sorrows and sins be a burden on your spirit, because they also are the children of your Father in heaven, and because for them also your divine brother and Saviour tasted the emptiness of life and the bitterness of death; go forth into the world out of self as out of a prison; live in the life of your neighbours, your country, mankind—in the life of the God and Father and Saviour of all; fill your life with the interests which belong

not to the fleeting moment, but to the unchanging order of the universe and the mighty victory which God has prepared in Christ from the foundation of the world, of good over evil. Then life will be to you no vanity, no vexation of spirit. Because your soul is yours ; because your true life is your own ; because God's purpose in giving you of His own life is fulfilled—all things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's.

In the same way, I will add, is immortality brought to light also. It is hard sometimes to believe in immortality. Many arguments which are advanced to prove it seem pitifully weak and poor. When the clods rattle on the coffin, it is hard to believe in immortality ; still harder when we see so much that is base and evil in mankind. If all men were as base as the basest, as mean as the meanest, it were not difficult, at any rate, to conceive of man as only a superior animal, who lives like other animals a brief life, and dies like them an unmeaning death. But when I see men who have an animal nature and subdue it ; who are placed in a material world and not confined by it ; who are above it, and see and know and live infinitely beyond it ; who have thoughts that wander through eternity—when I see men who are victorious over temptation, pain, death, all earthly change and chance ; who do good even if it be irksome, or painful, or dangerous, not as a duty only, but as a delight ; who, in the bewildering

storms of this life, out on its surging waters, steer calmly on to a haven of the existence of which they never doubt, I cannot believe them deceived; I cannot imagine them mortal; I cannot say of them or think of them, They are like the beasts which perish. I cannot think of Him, the First, and Head, and Saviour, and Captain of all these, as having been left for ever in the grave; I cannot suppose the soul of the Holy One to have seen corruption. Flesh and blood may turn again to clay; all human glory may fade; but truth and righteousness and love are divine and cannot die. A life which is filled by these is a part of the life of God, who inhabiteth eternity. It is impossible that it can be cut through and ended by a grave dug in consecrated or unhallowed ground. Thus, because in Christ, life—man's true life—has been brought to light, immortality is disclosed also. And when we thus add immortality to life—when we thus give to man his endless years, to the soul its deathless term—how great the force of the question, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

IV.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."—Isaiah lxiv, 6.

THE language of confession of sin is very different from that of confessions of faith. To use a common distinction, the one is the language of the heart, the other is the language of the head; the one is the language of feeling and of poetry, the other is the language of argument and history and science. Confessing his sins a man is, or may be, or rather ought to be, so much under the influence of deep emotion, that he naturally expresses himself, not in carefully measured and carefully guarded terms, but vividly, passionately, pictorially, imaginatively. A man confessing his sins as coolly and drily as if he were stating an anomaly in vegetable life or animal life, or an exception to a rule of grammar, could not be supposed to be candid, not to say devout. On the other hand, for

the purposes of creeds and confessions we choose, of course, those terms and those modes of speech which will serve to express, in the most exact and literal way, our ideas of God, of revelation, of duty, of the unseen and eternal. We eschew poetry, and aim at an accuracy of definition satisfactory to science.

You can see what the difference is from a single instance. In the Psalms of David we have some of the most memorable confessions the Bible contains. In these wonderful utterances of a penitent soul, there is a character portrayed which, if you take what is written in a literal sense, is not that of an eminently good man, but that of one of the worst men who ever lived. When he says, in the 51st Psalm, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," or, in another psalm, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger. Mine iniquities have gone over my head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me,"—when this is the way he expresses himself, we should have to suppose—if we forgot that this is the language of confession, and in its very nature poetical, imaginative—that David is here, by his own hand, and upon the authority of the Word of God, exhibited as a born and bred reprobate, a man under the dominion of every conceivable vice, a man without one shred of virtue clinging to him.

We know better, of course, than to construe his language thus. But, absurd as the supposition is,

suppose, now, it were needful to put the character of David into a creed or a confession of faith, and that the language he uses about himself were taken to describe that character, you can easily see that the effect would be to make him not a good man with some faults, but a bad man without one redeeming trait. If in a creed or confession of faith you met with the statement that David was a man in whose flesh there was no soundness because of his sins, and whose iniquities completely overwhelmed him, you would understand that a horrible fact was stated in a plain, literal, historical manner. David, in moments of penitence reproaching himself in presence of the Eternal Purity and Goodness, is one character; David, placed by us at the bar of impartial history, is another man altogether. The difference is a measure of the difference between the language of confession and that of creeds.

Take, again, St. Paul when he calls himself the chief of sinners. In that famous saying, he expressed boldly, imaginatively, but all the more truly and exactly, his feelings at the moment. What was foolish and perverse in his earlier life came back upon him now, in the way in which folly and perversity only come back upon a sensitive, noble, enlightened mind, and in a burst of sorrow, passionate because it was vain, he thought of himself and spoke of himself as if no one had ever been equally guilty.

Would any one take that saying of Paul and

put it where it would be read as if it were literal fact? Would any one, on the strength of such a confession, write down the Apostle Paul as the greatest sinner that ever lived? He had his faults; he was guilty (though in ignorance) of one great error; but even to compare him as a sinner with men whom we could name as living in his own time, or with men who have lived since, would be ridiculous; in that character, with all his pretensions to pre-eminence, he was indeed contemptible.

Or let us turn from Scripture to common life. The line of the martyrs never ends; and to prolong the line, the best and purest natures are often bound up in domestic relations with the worst and vilest, perhaps the fieriest of all possible martyrdoms. Imagine a case in which a pure and good woman, mated to a bad husband, and wronged beyond all but a woman's patience, should, at his death, begin to accuse herself in her grief, as if she had done and not suffered wrong. You can fancy such a woman, her old affection coming back upon her at the moment, and filling to the brim the fountain of sorrow, talking as if she had much of which to accuse herself in presence of her dead, as if he had been kind and loving, and she had been unreasonable and impatient. A woman's love and grief have no doubt often in this manner erred from the truth of history. Thus, no doubt, have the truest and the best often borne witness against

themselves over the ashes and the graves of those to whom they owed no duty they did not amply pay.

How preposterous would be the effect if any one could be absurd enough to take this language of excited feeling, and give it a prosaic sense; what a ridiculous account he would invent of a good woman's character and life; how completely he would turn things upside down, and make black white and white black.

I remark this distinction between the language of confession and that of confessions, because it is often overlooked, and because the fact that it is overlooked has some strange and unhappy consequences to religious thought and religious life. I remark it especially because it is a distinction which requires to be remembered in reading this passage, and many other such passages in the Scriptures. This language of the prophet, which is that of confession, has been taken and transferred to confessions of faith, written and unwritten (particularly the latter), and in this way has been turned from figurative to literal, from poetry to prose, from sense to nonsense; has been removed from a place where it has one meaning to a place where it has another or rather none at all.

Besides overlooking the fact that the prophet is not speaking here of mankind in general, but only of his own countrymen, then in exile, or returning from exile, and at any rate in disgrace and trouble because of their national follies and

sins,—besides overlooking this fact which is not without importance, people overlook the still more obvious and important fact that this is the language of a soul wrung at the moment with the bitterest anguish, the language of poetry, not of history or dogma. In consequence of this oversight, we have, in some confessions of faith founded upon Scripture, and we have certainly in the popular mind, an idea of human nature stamped with the authority of Scripture which is not scriptural and not true. Passages like this, in which noble souls in moments of high-wrought feeling have declared that all our righteousness is as filthy rags, and we are all as an unclean thing,—passages like this are taken as if the language were not that of feeling, but matter of fact ; and the doctrine is drawn from them that in human nature there is nothing good—everything, even the best, is bad; the very virtues of men "have the nature of sin."

It is not easy to see how such a perversion of Scripture should have established itself in general repute as Christian doctrine, but it is established. There are perhaps few notions more firmly planted in the common mind than the notion that what Scripture has to say, and what Christians have to believe, about human nature, is that the best of it is bad.

What the effect of this has been and is, it would be hard to tell. But that it tends, for one thing, to obscure to many minds the importance of moral

distinctions and moral issues can hardly be disputed. It is true that men are often better as well as often worse than their creeds, and that those moral instincts or dispositions or faculties or whatever you choose to call them, which are a part and an indestructible part of human nature, assert themselves in opposition to creeds when creeds ignore or contradict them. But still, if it is literally true that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and even our very virtues have the nature of sin, if moral distinctions are thus in general indistinct, it is inevitable that people should be tempted to ask—what is the use, in particular instances here and there, of being much concerned about these distinctions; if white is black, if the difference between virtue and vice is not clear at the best, what matters a little more or a little less of the one or the other?

It may be said, of course, in answer to this, that only the unbelieving and ungodly can argue in this way. Granting this to be true, I question if it does not make matters worse instead of better. It introduces into the sphere of moral obligation a distinction between saints and sinners, with the effect, not of making saints more saintly, but sinners more sinful. Those who are distinctly conscious of having received grace to believe the Gospel, and to live a religious life, feel of course, or ought to feel, that as Christians they are bound to avoid sin, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly. But, on the other hand, those who are not conscious of

having been thus called to be saints do not feel that even as men, as rational beings, they are bound to do the same; they do not feel this because they are accustomed to regard human nature as hopelessly bad, and human conduct, except in so far as it is distinctively religious, as all alike, or nearly all alike, sinful. So that it just comes to this—where this doctrine is in vogue, if the few consider themselves bound to be eminent saints, the many expect to be, and are content to be, nothing but sinners; at any rate, are open to the temptation, which besets sinners, if it does not overcome saints, to apologize for actual transgression by original sin, to make the depravity of human nature an excuse for the disregard of moral distinctions and moral issues.

If this be so, to import the language of confession of sin into a confession of faith is a fatal blunder—fatal to the moral and spiritual advancement of mankind. Nor is this the only way in which its fatal effects are to be traced. The progress of the race, even in the matter of religion, does not depend exclusively upon religious or, at any rate, ecclesiastical institutions and endeavours. Missionaries to the heathen abroad and missionaries to the worse heathen at home know how small a crop of anything worth reaping is to be got by sowing the seed of the Gospel in an unprepared soil. In order that religion itself may have its day and do its work, ignorance, barbarism, pauperism, crime, a host of social and moral evils which afflict mankind, must

be assailed and abated by other than religious means. If there is any lesson which history conclusively teaches it is this. Christ came in the fulness of time. An apostle, a prophet, a martyr, may be as one born out of due season; first-fruits of Christian labour may be gathered anywhere and at any time; but the birth and growth of Christian civilization, the moral and spiritual elevation of a community, depend upon conditions which are too complex to be materially changed in one generation or by one kind of process. But nothing is more natural than that religious people, of whose creed despair of human nature is a leading article, should ignore all this. Nothing is more natural, not to say logical, than for them to say, Since human nature needs to be completely regenerated, as it can only be by religious means, there is little use in trying to improve it by other measures.

Hence the common indifference and the occasional hostility of religious bodies and religious parties to movements and agencies, the aim of which is to further intelligence and morality. In matters which concern education, scientific inquiry, free thought, political and social reform, those who desire to see human nature bettered have often to fear most of all the apathy or the opposition of those who think that human nature must be regenerated. In such matters, as often as not, churches and religious coteries have been found separating their interests from those of a nation or a community as if they held a monopoly of human

welfare, and as if any infringement of their patent must be attended with irretrievable disaster to mankind.

A host of glaring evils, which are a reproach, not only to our Christianity, but to our civilization, are allowed to exist, not because they cannot be remedied at all, but because they cannot be remedied in a religious manner, and by religious institutions, People will give money lavishly to churches, and to charities sanctified by connection with churches, who will take no interest in institutions and agencies which are as necessary as churches for the bettering of our moral and social condition. Talk to religious people—at any rate, the multitude of unthinking religious people—about the lower and lowest classes of society; argue that the ordinary conditions of life among these classes refuse to men and women the right to be human, not to speak of the privilege of being saints—Ah, they will answer, suppose people were all well housed, well educated, well paid, and ever so much were done for their morals, how much would they be the better as regards the one thing needful? And thus a doctrine which removes all doubt as to the state of human nature being deplorable, not to say appalling, thwarts and discourages efforts made to improve it.

Be this as it may however, there is no difficulty in interpreting such language as this of the prophet if we only remember what kind of language it is. It is not the exceeding baseness of human nature

which utters itself in this language, or adopts it when it is uttered; it is rather that rare goodness to which here and there a soul like that of this prophet, happily for itself and for the world, attains. The greatest and noblest souls, striving after the loftiest and divinest aims, have been most sensible of fault and failure in their lives, and have in their confessions borne hardest upon the weakness and sinfulness of human nature. Not when men are sunk in depths of vice and sensuality, but when they are struggling upwards to difficult, impossible heights of virtue and nobleness, are they seized with the "strong crying and tears" which pours itself forth in such language as this, in David's fifty-first psalm, in Paul's "I am the chief of sinners," "Oh wretched man that I am." It is not when you are content to live a life like that of the common multitude, engrossed in the pursuit of low aims, actuated by mean passions; it is when you are in sympathy with the few earnest, true, heroic, minds that are concerned above all about right and truth and goodness—that you feel for yourself and for others how poor and weak is human nature at the best, and how full is human life of error and sin and blindness. It is not the utter depravity of human nature, but rather a rare goodness and nobleness which expresses itself in the language of confession, of which this is a specimen.

Read it thus and it is true and simple. Ap-

parently when the prophet wrote these words his countrymen had just returned from captivity, and were again established at Jerusalem—Jerusalem laid waste, and its crown and ornament, "the holy and beautiful house of God," trampled in the dust. Something [had] been learned by the captives in their long and miserable exile. There was a lesson taught them now by their desolate homes and overturned altars. But still, to an earnest and far-seeing mind, there was manifest the need of a much wider and deeper religious reformation than had yet been accomplished. Before the nation could be again what it once was, it had much to learn and much to unlearn. It was a superficial and partial work which adversity had yet done in the way of curing the evils which had brought adversity in their train. With painful certainty and distinctness this was evident to the prophet. His soul was burdened to think of it, and he burst out, in his grief, with the confession as for himself and his country. "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

It is easy to imagine a prophetic mind of our own country and our own time using similar language to express similar feelings. We have a great deal to be proud of as a nation. Much that is British is great and noble. On the surface of things we appear to be a very religious, as well as an industrious and prosperous

people. Our Protestant institutions are, no doubt, many of them admirable. But can you imagine any very sincere, penetrating, religious mind, one impressed little by material prosperity and sensitive to moral and spiritual conditions, looking beneath the surface of our national life, contemplating all the dishonesty in trade and manufactures, the corruption of morals among the rich, the low intelligence, superstition, vile tastes of the mob, the religious cant and conventionality, the bitter rivalry of sects, which exist along with our Protestant institutions, and not be forced to say—"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away"—we are not a great and glorious people; "we all do fade as a leaf"?

As the language of confession—confession being the act not of the vile but of the noble—we read this language, and the application of it to national life is plain. In this light it is no less easy to apply it to individual life and conduct. Strive to be true and good after the example of Christ, and it will be easy perhaps to satisfy both the world and the church that you are successful in the endeavour; but if your aim is really to live Christ's life, you will not so easily satisfy yourself—you will only at the best succeed far enough to be conscious of immeasurable failure. Compared with the good you ought to win, any good to which you attain will appear to you miserable failure. Compared with the purity, nobleness, greatness, to which you aspire, that

which you reach will be felt to be almost sin and misery.

Thus this language in its own light is true, easily seen to be true. In any other light it is false. He that doeth righteousness is righteous. If you are using just weights and measures in your business, if when you buy and sell you do so with a strict regard to honesty and fair play, if you will not lie to please any man or to avoid any man's displeasure, if you are giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, if you are straightforward, sincere, and kindly in your dealings with your neighbours, and would rather be much wronged by them all than wrong one of them in the least in word or in deed, all this, be sure, is according to the eternal law of righteousness; never was or can be, in the smallest degree, of the nature of sin; but is good, and only good. And be sure that your duty is not to trifle with this, or dispense with it as if it were rags, or as if it were filthy; but it is to cling to it more than to life itself.

I know that right things may be done from wrong motives, and with inferior views, and I know that they are not then of the same quality or the same value as if they were done from right impulses and with the highest aims. I know, too, that if a man breaks one of the commandments he is in a sense guilty of all, and cannot set himself up as a perfect man, or as a more deserving man than another who has broken all the ten. But then right is right, and wrong is wrong, be it in saint or sinner, and nothing can make these two opposites change places, or

have the same character or issues. Wrong is eternally to be feared and hated; right is eternally to be loved and sought after. Suppose you know you are wrong in much, if there is anything in which you are right, do not consider that to be filthy rags —die rather than surrender it to force or fraud.

Instead of our reverence for the perfect life in Christ requiring us to make light account of any righteousness in ourselves or in our fellow-men, it teaches us to prize it as our very life, nay, as better than life. It is not by renouncing our own righteousness, in this sense, but by clinging to it, that we attain to the righteousness which is by faith. To be faithful in that which is least is the way to be faithful in much. It was not to render our righteousness superfluous, or to certify that any of our righteousness is worthless, that Christ lived and died; it was to make us truly righteous, to make the tree good and its fruit good, to righten us in our whole being and not merely in some of our actions, to bind us in a new covenant with God our Father, to be the servants only of righteousness.

V.

AUTHORITY OF TRUTH AND AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIBES.

"For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."—Matt. vii, 29.

AUTHORITY was the very breath of life to the Scribes. They were the lawyers of a people whose laws were believed to be divine, though subscribed by the name of Moses; and their business was to expound these laws, and to act as judges in the administration of them. Like our own lawyers, therefore, they were constantly referring to authority. Moses was their great authority. They counted the words he was supposed to have written, and found in every one of them a hidden as well as an open meaning. After Moses and beneath him they placed the prophets; after them and beneath them the most famous rabbis. They quoted the sayings of their great teachers as our lawyers quote verdicts of courts and decisions of judges. They judged by such

sayings cases, both civil and ecclesiastical, which came before them. They enforced the elaborate ceremonialism which Christ scouted and ridiculed by the authority of their great lawgivers and their great teachers. The thousand and one rules and laws and by-laws and precepts and commandments about nothing or next to nothing—mint and anise and cummin—which it was their function to enforce, they enforced on the same authority. They were for ever talking of authority—authority of the law, authority of God, of Moses, of prophets, of doctors. And in addition to all this authority, there was their own. They had all that clerical and priestly assumption and dogmatism with which sacred offices inflate most amply the bosoms of the commonest men. Church leaders and office-bearers are even now in the habit of speaking as if they were infallible; though, in the case of the Pope, we who are Protestants dispute the claim of any man to be so considered. No less were the Scribes, who were at once the clergymen and the lawyers of their people, in the habit, we may be sure, of speaking with authority of their own.

This accumulation of authorities which you commonly find in the utterances of divines, and which was especially prominent among the pretensions of the Scribes, has an imposing effect on the mind, at any rate when there is nothing more real than itself with which to compare or contrast it. You hear the authority of God—the Word

of God—quoted as if there never had been, and never could be, two opinions about what the Word of God is; and you hear this authority quoted by men who speak as if they were quite as infallible as the Word of God itself. It needs courage and even audacity to set oneself up against such authority, or to doubt or question it. The great majority of men surrender to it at discretion. Those who withstand it are few, and they are apt to suffer for their hardihood. With this authority, however, in a fashion and in a measure all their own, the Scribes were in the habit of investing themselves. They sat in Moses' seat, and spoke with the authority at once of unerring God and infallible men.

On the other hand, and in contrast to them, Christ was a teacher whose style of teaching was marked by the total absence of authority. He Himself was no authorized, or, as we should say, ordained teacher. The church did not recognize or employ Him. He was neither priest nor scribe nor rabbi, but a Galilean peasant, with regard to whom it was a matter of astonishment among the people that He had sense, seeing He had no learning. Imagine a ploughman or tradesman among ourselves leaving his plough or his joiner's bench to go about and teach and preach. What authority would he have, suppose no sect countenanced him, or suppose all sects as far as they noticed him agreed to denounce him? That was precisely the authority of Christ.

It is true that He spoke as if He were in direct communication somehow with God the Father—as if He were uttering the mind and will of the Eternal not by guess, but by commission. But in doing this He only did what all supremely earnest minds have done in all ages and all places; feeling that what He had to say was the truth, He did not hesitate to say that it was God's truth, and eternal.

Apart from this reference to God as the source and fountain of truth, which at any rate might have been understood to be only a brief emphatic way of saying that truth is true—notice how free His teaching is from the faintest tinge of authority. Glance over the Sermon on the Mount —the sayings here referred to as just ended. It is not a sermon like one of our sermons, bristling with quotations from the Bible and the old commentators and divines. It is not a discourse like what we may suppose the discourses of the Scribes to have been, filled with arguments and sayings and conclusions of the doctors and the rabbis. There are scattered references and allusions to the law and to tradition; but they are brought forward in the way of illustration, not of authority, commonly to enforce a forgotten truth by contrast with a prevailing error. What strikes us most in reading His sermon is that He says what He has to say on nobody's authority but His own, which was none at all. He does not take you to the books of Moses, and beginning there, and going on through the follow-

ing books of the Bible, prove to you by texts and inferences from texts, that this doctrine is to be received and that is to be rejected. Far less does He refer to the standards of the church, to those traditions of the fathers to which the Scribes made everlasting appeal. You do not find Him here or elsewhere quoting some great rabbi as we quote Calvin. Except that He knows that He is speaking the truth, and is therefore speaking for God and in His name, He speaks for Himself —a man with no authority, but such as was given Him by His peasant's coat among a priest-ridden people.

No contrast, therefore, could have been more striking than that which existed between Him and the Scribes in the matter of authority. They had the highest authority continually in their mouths. They sat in Moses' seat, and were invested by Moses' authority with the authority of God. By His very appearance as a peasant, as a layman, and still more by His method of teaching, Christ disclaimed and even disdained all authority. Yet the common people who heard Him were astonished at His doctrine, and what particularly surprised them was that He taught with authority, and not as the Scribes. With that acuteness which belongs to the popular judgment in such things, they felt that the Scribes talked about authority, while He had it; as some dotard, blind, old emperor might prate of his empire in presence of a minister, a born ruler of men, minister in name,

but emperor in fact. Not as the Scribes. What a commentary upon all manner of papal and clerical infallibilities—on the dropsical assumption which is so common where sacred offices are common! Not as the authority-men—not as those who if they had not divine authority had nothing—not as those who if stripped of authority were reduced to shadows! If the Scribes crucified Christ in the flesh, He gibbeted them and all their posterity in the spirit.

Supposing some real teacher of religious truth—a discoverer, not of new truth, but of eternal truth—were to arise in one of our churches, and not after the manner of divines, stringing texts together, or piecing together obsolete doctrines, but freshly, without fear, in accordance with the spirit of the age, and with reference to the great wants of the time, spoke out the things which be of God—I wonder whether his appearance would not have something of the same effect upon the Pope and our infallible divines that Christ's had upon the infallible Scribes—whether the real authority of one would not turn to ridicule the feigned authority of many.

Be this as it may, however, we have here to note that the common people did perceive the difference, or rather the contrast, in the matter of authority, between the Scribes and Christ. They saw that somehow He had authority which with all their pretence of it, they had not. How do you account for that? I think it is not diffi-

cult to account for it, if you will glance again at the Sermon on the Mount. Remember what the Scribes laid stress upon in their teaching. It was rites and ceremonies, according to Moses; washing the outside of the cup and platter, according to the fathers; petty proprieties, as between servant and master, brother and brother, neighbour and neighbour; questions of marriage and divorce; distinctions between swearing by the temple on the one hand and the gold of the temple on the other, and between swearing by the altar on the one hand and swearing by the gift upon the altar on the other; fasts, new moons, and sabbaths, words and things forbidden or allowed on account of their magical virtue, unblemished church standing. On the other hand, these were not the things on which Christ laid stress. He put all these things aside with a firm, not to say contemptuous, hand. He scorned them as paltry, or denounced them as mischievous. Look at His sermon. He tells you not to be of a sad countenance like the hypocrites, not to pray at the corners of the streets, not to do what the Scribes said it was all the law and the prophets to do.

What are the things on which He does insist? Look, and you will find that His great doctrine is that God is love, that He is best worshipped and served, or worshipped and served only by those who love good and hate evil. The principles of conduct which He enforces are simply those great principles of righteousness, truth,

goodness, charity, which all religious and moral systems aim at enforcing, and which, as we hold, find in His teaching their supreme and final expression.

Away with attempts to serve God by long prayers or many prayers, by fasts and penances, by sacrifices, by orthodox belief, by works of the law which have no root in the soil of truth and goodness. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you. Be like God the Father in His fatherly love. Be pure, be true, be just, be generous, be magnanimous, be unselfish and unworldly. This is the sum and substance of what Christ says. In a word it is morality, of course the highest and purest, and connected with faith in God as the Father and Saviour of all, but still it is morality. Blessed are the good. Cursed are the evil. This is what all Christ's sayings here, His blessings and His reproofs and His exhortations amount to. Not a word about justification by faith, or the doctrine of the atonement or church membership, or conversion in a moment, or a deathbed repentance, or any one of all those things of which, as concerning salvation, we hear so much. Not a word about any of these things. It is all—Blessed are the good, the pure, the true, the meek, the kind; cursed are the unjust, the impure, the worldly, the selfish.

Now, this is the secret of Christ's teaching with an authority which the Scribes pretended to have,

and had not. Unlike many of their doctrines and some of ours, all this speaks for itself, and is its own witness to the conscience. He that hath ears to hear let him hear. There is no limit to the questions a man may put to me if I talk to him about this or that theory of inspiration, or about the Trinity, or the atonement, as if his salvation depended upon the particular way in which he views these things—he may have certain difficulties in regard to these which all my texts of Scripture and all my sentences from the fathers and from the standards of the church do not suffice to solve. There is no end of debate about these things. I can understand why there should have been debate. There may be more than there has been. I cannot understand any one saying that no debate should ever have been or ought to be. But it is wholly different with those things, those great principles of conduct, of which Christ here takes account, and on which He lays stress. It is useless to recommend them by texts. It is absurd to palm them off upon people by authority. They are indisputable. If they are anything they are their own witness to the human soul. They speak for themselves. If there are two opinions about them, there are only two—not two-and-twenty. You must take one or other of two sides in regard to them—that of reason or unreason.

Any one who, in any age or place, teaches in the spirit of Christ, any one who teaches what Christ here taught—love to God and man—needs no church,

no Bible, no Moses, no Augustine, no Calvin, to support him and back him. He has right on his side, which, in the matter of opinion, is might. When it is day no man needs to go about saying, "It is not night, it is not night." No more when it is said, "Blessed are the good," do you need to prove that it is quite true. All the world is on your side, if not in practice, in theory. All nature is on your side. All experience and all history are in your favour. You speak to every man with authority, because every man's bosom is the witness to itself that what you say is true. You don't need to quote Euclid or any of the philosophers in order to demonstrate that two straight lines cannot enclose a space. No more do you need to quote either Moses or Calvin to prove that to be evil and unthankful is to be out of tune with the universe and with God, and so to be cursed and miserable. Do good and get good, because God is good; do evil and get evil, for the same comprehensive reason. This is a discovery which is always being made afresh by religious genius; and, as often as it is made, it is acknowledged to be true by others, because they have all their lives been making the same discovery for themselves only less clearly. Preachers who preach a system of theology need to appeal to authority. They are impressive, if at all, not from what they say, but from the authority they claim for saying it. It is different with preachers and teachers of religion—with those whom God ordains to prophesy, line upon line,

precept upon precept, that to love God and man is all the law and the prophets. They don't need authority to recommend their word. There is authority in it. It matters not who said it first or who says it last, because it is the truth.

This was the way in which it was felt that Christ had authority. He ignored in His teaching those things for which authority was required; He insisted upon those things that speak for themselves, and carry authority along with them. These were, —these are—the great principles of righteousness, goodness, morality, or whatever you like to call the nobler way of life. As He enlarged upon these, harped upon these, people accustomed to get from their religious teachers not lights for existence, but marching orders for the day, were struck with the difference. His discourse was nature speaking to nature—a bird pouring forth its song into a listening ear; not the voice of a watchman calling the hour of night, and answered only by its echo.

There is a great distinction in religious matters, to which all this points—a distinction between things too trivial to mention, and things that cannot be too often or too earnestly spoken; between the numberless commandments and traditions of men and those few eternal truths which are all the law and the prophets. Those things about which sects and parties in the church differ and contend, in proof of which we have to be referred to this text and that, and to this authority and that—these things are of small importance. The very fact that

they are obscure and disputable is a proof that they are trivial. It is those things of which Christ here speaks—faith in God as good, truth, righteousness, goodness; it is those things about which there is no dispute, with respect to which sects, even sects, are impossible, that are important, infinitely important. Those matters of faith and practice that really concern us here and hereafter are not left to doctors of divinity or to church courts to settle and determine. They were determined from all eternity, so that when God divided between the day and the night, they were made as plain as the difference between night and day.

It is still as true, then, as it ever was, that Christ speaks with authority and not as the Scribes. Those whose mouths are full of authorities—the letter of scripture, standards of the church, opinions of the fathers, doctrines of the reformers—are of very little authority to this unbelieving generation. No one now is much impressed, not to say alarmed, by decisions of church courts, presbyteries, synods, convocations, councils. They speak of authority, but they have little. Few are guided by their judgments, still fewer are frightened by them. There is a great disposition, not on the part of free thinkers merely, but of all classes of men, to question much which has been taught, and is still taught upon authority by our official teachers. Many of the traditions and doctrines of the fathers to which divines still cling, and for which they quote their numerous authorities, are openly dis-

puted or denied, not outside of decent society, or outside of the church, but inside both. Men's minds cannot any longer be confined within those narrow bounds in which they were cabined when the authority of the church was absolute. They must have liberty to think, to inquire, to doubt, where once it was imperative to hear and to assent.

But while authority has thus departed from the Scribes, it is felt more and more strongly that Christ's authority is not only as great as it ever was, but that it can never be less than it has been. In spite of all religious inquiry, discussion, doubt, denial—very much because of it—all that our Lord here says in the Sermon on the Mount is felt to have the force and certainty of absolute eternal truth. However people may quarrel with systems of divinity, or ecclesiastical institutions and arrangements, no sane man comes forward to deny that Christianity, as it is here exhibited by its Author, is truth. No man has said, or will say, that the religion here expounded is likely to be soon superseded by something higher and better. Just because men question the authority of other teachers, so much the better is it seen how unquestionable is the authority of Christ. Time has shaken one ecclesiastical system after another to its foundation; but time for that reason, only reveals more clearly that the foundation on which the Church rests is the Rock of Ages.

Here, then, we touch upon a principle with regard

to religion, which is not commonly affirmed, but commonly denied, and yet is certain—viz., that in its sphere authority has no place.

If it enters there, it is but to blight and to destroy. I may take upon the credit, I may receive upon the authority of another man, statements about many things of which I have myself no knowledge, and with regard to which I have no experience. If I am to know many things at all, or know them well, I must do so. I may believe, for example, upon the authority of travellers like Livingstone and Baker, that there is a great lake, or system of lakes, in the centre of Africa. Except for what I know from such authorities as these, I know nothing, and could know nothing, on the subject. I may hold, in the same way, on the authority of political economists, that there is always a certain proportion between wages, which is the price of labour, and the price of food. Knowing nothing of these matters from my own observation, I may yet trust the observation of others in regard to them as if it were my own. But the vital difference between all such things, and those things about which religion properly so called is concerned is, that it does not matter whether I believe these things at all, certainly not whether I believe them with this or that degree of conviction or of certainty, whereas on the other hand, my religious beliefs being the expression of my soul, the question whether they are true or not, and again,whether they are of this or that degree of strength, is a matter of the same impor-

tance as my soul. Whether I believe in Livingstone's discoveries, or the aphorisms of political economists at all; whether I believe in them a little more or a little less, is no great matter; but it is a matter of transcendent consequence whether I believe in, that is to say, whether I love, truth and righteousness and goodness, and not only whether I believe in them, but how I believe in them. It is one thing for me to appreciate truth and goodness as possibly important, or what I should wish to consider important, or what I have proved to be important, and another thing to love truth and goodness with all my soul and strength and heart and mind. In the matter of religious beliefs degree is everything. The question is not, Do you believe? but, How do you believe, to what extent, in what fashion? If, then, from mere indolence and sluggishness of mind, or from fear of the displeasure of some one, God or man, I accept my religious beliefs upon authority, instead of making inquiry for myself, having my own thoughts, exercising my own heart and soul, in regard to them, authority does not aid my beliefs, it weakens or destroys them. The authority of truth is all that it is good for any soul that religious beliefs should have. If any other authority be added to them, their force and virtue is so far not strengthened but impaired. The custom, then, of looking to authority and not to truth, in religious questions and religious affairs, is injurious and destructive. It diverts the mind from the task of obtaining a certainty worth some-

thing, by giving it beforehand a certainty which is worth nothing.

Apply this to some of those things which rightly or wrongly are commonly considered religious. There is a theory of the inspiration of the Bible—that every word of it was dictated by God just as it has been written. If a man believes this, he believes it upon authority; he can know it no other way. Now, this is what is usually believed about the Bible, this and nothing more, and nothing less. What is the result? In many cases people, satisfied with holding a theory about the Bible, don't understand the Bible, don't try to understand it as they would try to understand another book; don't use it as they would use another book; but string together sentences from it, which make sometimes sense and sometimes nonsense. On the other hand, suppose that a man has no theory of inspiration thrust upon him, but goes to his Bible and finds in it a rare, an unequalled exhibition of the highest wisdom and the noblest humanity, and has therefore to say to himself—I don't know how all this is here, but here it is, and it makes this book divine; and as for me, it is my delight to pore over it, and to study it—that man's belief about the Bible, because it is his own, and because no authority has imposed it on him, is worth something to him, and the book is worth much to him in virtue of his belief.

Take, again, the great doctrine of Christ's divinity. Whatever authority churches possess or claim

is exerted peremptorily to guard that doctrine. Of all those, however, who say Lord, Lord, to Christ, who have been taught to affirm His divinity, and affirm it with more or less zeal; of all these, how many are there with whom this means any intelligent belief in Him as a divine being; whose lives are better or worse for believing it; to whom it is anything but a barren, abstract proposition in theology? Is it not the case that the great majority, or at any rate a very large number in all our churches, finding themselves required by authority to say that Christ is the second person in the Trinity, content themselves with saying it, not inquiring how He is so, or whether they really believe He is so or not? Out of empty minds they give Him an empty title.

I do not mean, of course, to deny that there are many Christians to whom the belief in Christ's divinity is more than a bare and barren assent to a theological proposition. I know that there are many Christians to whom that belief is not only the leading article of a creed, but the soul of their Christian life. Though the doctrine comes to them with authority, they do not believe it on that ground; they believe it not because they have been told to believe it, but because they know it, because it harmonizes with their other beliefs, because their spiritual experience owns its influence.

Let us, however, set aside authority altogether, and

all that authority requires us to hold about Jesus Christ, and let us look at His life as it is here written, and as we would look at any other life; let us study it for ourselves, observe its purity, its sweetness, its greatness. If doing so, we are struck, as we may well be, with admiration and wonder, if we feel within ourselves—Here is what we cannot enough admire or revere or love; here is all that we have dreamed, or can imagine of beauty and nobleness; here is all that we have ever conceived of in the way of goodness; since divine is a name for the highest and the best, this is divine—if, I say, simply looking at Christ's life as it is, and thinking our own thoughts about it, we thought this, would this not amount to something of a genuine belief in Christ? As our own, the result and expression of our unaided, unbiassed, unforced judgment, would not this be a good substitute, as regards the making of our lives Christ-like, for all that authority can do for us, —at any rate for all that authority does for most of us?

Passing from these things, and coming back once more to those of which Christ here speaks —truth and righteousness and goodness—I venture to say, last of all, that we have to beware of the influence of authority in respect to these things. The letter (another's word) killeth, the spirit (our own thought if it is pure) maketh alive. As so much of St. Paul's argumentation is intended to show, any law, but that of the

spirit of life in Christ Jesus (which is no law), is a law of sin and death. To many Christians Christianity is but a law of that kind. The things they do, in the name of religion, even their charity, they do, looking always to authority, to the letter of Scripture, to certain established customs and rules. They observe Sundays and celebrate Sacraments, they distribute tracts, give alms, convert the heathen. It is all done by rule, under authority. The question always is—Is this commanded? Is that forbidden? What is our warrant for this? Have we any authority for that?

The outcome is often a sorry thing in the way of Christian worth and nobleness. There are strict Christians of strict sects, whose righteousness, warranted and stamped with authority, is yet only the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees over again—righteousness which disowns nature and is disowned by grace. Their goodness is churchy, not human or divine. They hold a man in greater detestation for heresy than for villany, for a theological opinion which is supposed to be wrong than for a life in which there is nothing right. They subscribe to heathen missions, neglect their poor relations, and are unmannerly with their neighbours. They make money by tricks of trade, build churches which are tombs of the prophets and museums of their dry bones, and suffer the poor and condemn the poor to live in hovels. They hold a man in esteem if

he is rich and goes to church. If a man is a steady church-goer he is a good man, though he deals in worthless goods, or cheats every market-day, or is a faithless servant or a heartless acquaintance. If a poor man is ever so honest, and industrious, and kind, he is only a moral man, unless he make a great profession of religion. Are these Christ's ideas of truth and goodness as they are here expressed? Is this goodness anything like Christ's?

But suppose now, on the other hand, a man has learned from the example of Jesus Christ, and by His grace, sincerely to love whatever is good, true, pure, lovely, of good report; to love it for its own sake, to love it with all his soul, and to hate what is opposed to it with all his heart—suppose, I say, a man loves truth and goodness thus, and thus hates falsehood and iniquity, he will not need to ask always what is commanded or forbidden, but he will ask what is true or false, what is right or wrong, what is lovely or unseemly. So, if he has any goodness it will not be churchy or onesided; it will be more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees; it will not put mint and anise and cummin in place of honesty and kindness; it will not rob Peter to pay Paul; it will not starve workmen at home to support missionaries to the heathen abroad; it will not make up for a deficiency of generosity by superfluous devoutness; it will not compound for niggardliness by zeal against innovations in doctrine or public worship; it will not snub

honest doubt to make room for blatant piety; it will not expose its owner to the censure which once struck the religious world heavily in the words —These things—justice and righteousness and mercy—ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

To me it seems, I confess, that there is not a worse sign of our religious state than the prevalence of the alarm lest science, truly or falsely so called, should abolish Christianity altogether. Inquiry, even if there is doubt along with it —as doubt there must be where there is inquiry—is to be courted rather than feared by the disciples of the Preacher of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who are afraid of the results of inquiry or of scepticism in regard to what He taught are mistaken. They are jealous of the authority of churches, not of His; zealous for the continuance of church systems, not for the coming of His kingdom. There is no fear of His authority. To be afraid of what may happen to it is to suppose that the eternal order of the world may chance to fail. Abolish truth and goodness from the world and man will be abolished; but only then will the Christianity of Christ suffer loss, or be numbered with perishable earthly things. God remains, though doctors of divinity come and go. Though councils of the church dispute or condemn councils, though theologies confute theologies, "God was, and is, and is to be." He will not suffer an ingenious sceptic in his study,

or an unbelieving generation in its customs, to upset the law by which truth and goodness have a place among the things that are, and Christianity, which is the doctrine according to goodness and truth, is established in the earth. If it was said by a fond father of his son, it is true of Christ, "His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed."

VI.

THE FAITH OF MOSES AND THE FAITH OF CHRIST.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward."—Hebrews, xi, 24-26.

IT is not, of course, as random recollections of the saints that we are to read the verses of this chapter. They are biographical notices taken from the Old Testament to illustrate that principle of faith, of which the New Testament has so much to say. In this view the variety of character and of action which finds a place in this chapter is itself a lesson on the subject; it reminds us that faith is the spring of all noble life, that all that is great and good in human character and human history is from one root—faith. Characters more dissimilar than those of Abraham and his wife Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, Samson, could not be imagined. But, according to the Scriptures, they all lived noble

lives, or did noble deeds, and in every case it was by faith. Their deeds were as various as their characters. Noah built an ark, Abraham offered up Isaac, Rahab received the spies with peace. Yet all these deeds alike were deeds of faith. There is, I say, an illustration (and a notable one) of faith in this very variety. Very narrow views are possible, and indeed common, on the subject of faith. We are apt, it would appear, to limit it to one type of character and actions of one pattern, especially to limit it to some particular fashion not of natural goodness, but of church piety. Possibly, therefore, no instruction on the subject of faith is more needful for us than what we get on the very face of this chapter, and from the fact that it enrols in its list of saints and heroes and enshrines in its roll of noble deeds a variety of character and action as great as could be imagined.

Here is one illustration of faith—perhaps the greatest and clearest of the whole number—Moses.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

According to the history, he was rescued from the fate to which the male children of his people were condemned, drawn out of the Nile in his ark of bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter, brought

up by her, and adopted as her son. He was, therefore, one of those happy or unhappy mortals who seem born rather to enjoy pleasures than to do any work or be of any use. He was learned, we are told, in all the learning of the Egyptians. The court at which he lived (supposing him to have lived at court) was refined and luxurious to a proverb. As the son of Pharaoh's daughter he would have at his command all that is called pleasure: pleasures of intellect and taste, besides all the pleasures of sense, the pleasures of the man of the world, and of the man of fashion. And he did enjoy these pleasures for a while; as the phrase "when he was come to years" suggests, he was an Egyptian in his feelings and habits till then, because, reared as he had been, it was natural and pleasant to be an Egyptian. There never was a great man whose temptations were not as great as his gifts. And in his youth, his Egyptian youth, the greatest man in the Bible except Christ was one who knew what were the fascinations of idleness, and luxury, and high station, as well as any man then living.

I do not mean to say that his pleasures, those open to him in the position he held, were sins. I do not mean to say that all of them or any of them were sins. By no means. His pleasures need not have been, and, up to a certain point in his career, when he renounced them, were not, sinful pleasures. Leave everything else out of account,

his rank, his influence, his command of comfort and luxury, his leisure and opportunities for refined amusements and mental cultivation—these were pleasures which he no doubt enjoyed. There was no sin in his enjoying these pleasures. In ordinary circumstances, with reference to any general laws or rules of human conduct, he was at liberty to enjoy these pleasures as much as he liked. In themselves and apart from duties with which they might chance to be incompatible, these things were pleasures, and yet not in the smallest degree sins. It was what made them sins to Moses which shows us what sort of man he was, what nobleness of character there was in him by faith. It is, I repeat, the way in which pleasures which were not sins became sins to him that is the very thing we have to note, if we wish to understand the faith of Moses.

There is an exquisite simplicity in the story in Exodus concerning the change in Moses from youth to man, from Egyptian to Israelite, from courtier to patriot. "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren, and he looked this way and that way; and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." He went out, not as one who had never before had permission to leave home, but as one who, with mature intellect, through effect of years which bring the

philosophic mind, had begun to think for himself and see with his eyes; and when he went out, this was what he saw among his brethren—a sight which at once broke up the day-dream in which his life so far had passed, and brought him with a shock face to face with the world, miserable world as it actually was. The deed which he did was unpremeditated, the work of a moment. It was done not without alarm; but it marked the critical moment when his life passed into a higher and nobler phase. He went forth an Egyptian courtier; he came back a Hebrew patriot. After this, whatever they might be to others, the pleasures of Pharaoh's court were to him the pleasures of sin: the best and most refined and most innocent of these pleasures were sinful. To go on enjoying his old pleasures after this wakening up of his manhood, this recognition of the fact that there was an oppressed people in existence, and that that people was his people, was a crime of which he could not be guilty. To remain in a position in which his voice could not be raised in favour of justice and humanity; to be openly on the side of oppression and wrong; to pass life in comfort and luxury while his kindred and his countrymen groaned at their terrible tasks, and writhed under the lash of the oppressor: this was sin to him. There was in him that nobleness of nature which, besides tending to sympathy with the oppressed, revolts from all that is selfish and cruel; and this nobleness was stirred up in him,

by seeing the state of his kindred, and comparing it with his own. This was his faith. Faith saved him from being content to be idle and useless, and gave him zeal and courage to play the part of a man and of a hero in the liberation of his people. Faith made him refuse idleness and luxury as sin, when he saw that there was work to be done and suffering to be endured in a good cause. Faith made him despise the honours of a court when, by identifying himself with the shame and sorrow of a race of slaves, he could help them out of bondage worse than death.

In a word, faith, in the case of Moses, was another name for manliness or heroism. Every man who fights for his country, not from fear or by compulsion, but freely and bravely; every man who sacrifices time, or comfort, or health, or ease, for the good of his fellow-men; every man who makes a stand for truth, fair play, honesty, against lies and meanness and treachery and wrong; every man who thinks himself despicable if he is idle and useless, and respectable if he has duty to do and does it: every such man has in him something of the faith of Moses.

Every young man gifted with health and wealth —the wealth of a passionate nature, which is the greatest wealth of all—sees before him, in the way of self-indulgence, pleasures that are not only tempting, but well nigh irresistible. Let one such turn away his eyes from these pleasures, and fix them upon some manly and noble object to be

gained by honest and earnest effort, by self-restraint and sympathy with his kindred and with mankind—he shows something of the faith of Moses.

More or less of the theory of the universe, and of life and duty, that we call religious doctrine, may go along with this faith, and be a part of it. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"—there may go along with it wider or narrower, higher or lower, truer or less true views of the world beyond the visible to which these things belong. But it is of the essence of faith that it looks beyond the seen and temporal to that which is unseen and eternal; beyond what our lower self craves for its satisfaction, to what our higher self demands for its well-being; beyond pleasure to duty; beyond meat, drink, and clothing, to righteousness and goodness. It is of the essence of faith that he who has it feels himself to be here in a world full of better things than pleasures, whether innocent or sinful, which are only pleasures of sense; and in which to be right is greater and better than to be mighty or to be rich—feels, in a word, that the best of this life and all life is goodness.

We see, then, how the case stands as regards much faith and little. Any one who gives up sinful pleasures, or pleasures distinctly tending to sin, any one who is tempted and sins not, shows some faith. Any one who gives up pleasures that are not sinful, who deems them sinful for him what-

ever they be for others—who does this, I mean, in order to gain some useful and noble end—shows much faith.

Again, he who follows duty rather than inclination as far as there is little hardship in doing so, shows a little faith. He who, having, like Moses, to choose between affliction and duty on the one hand, and pleasures on the other, chooses the one and refuses the other, shows much faith. He who gives money which he does not need, to promote a good work, shows a litttle faith. He who gives his time and health and life itself to further some beneficent end, shows much faith. And in all this we but say what we have said already, that faith is another name for manliness.

It was a marvellous faith which Moses exhibited in his long and eventful life. With one or two mysterious lapses he played his heroic part in the most heroic fashion. It was not what he risked, or what he suffered in the execution of his great task at the hands of the Egyptians or other enemies of his race; it was what he had to endure from his countrymen; it was their murmurings and backslidings, their servile spirit, the bondage to sense which they carried with them out of the house of bondage—it was this which tried what manner of man he was, and of what stuff was his faith. As with all the greatest, as with Christ Himself, his conflict was not so much with force as with stupidity and baseness—those ancient and indomitable foes which never fail

to rise up against the man whose purpose is to elevate his fellows. What he chose when he left the court of Pharaoh, and cast in his lot with Israel, was not perhaps what he at first imagined. It was not to be rewarded by the gratitude of the people to whom he gave up his life for the hostility of the people whom he deserted. His choice was reproach and calumny in preference to ease and honour. He gave up a position in which he enjoyed honour without having to seek it, for one in which he had to endure that bitterest of all sorrows, the sense of being misunderstood and misrepresented in his own house, and among his own kindred. Egypt was a hard master to serve, but Israel whom Moses served was a harder master still. Yet he served Israel well. They murmured for the flesh pots of Egypt. Unredeemed in spirit, though the house of bondage was left behind them, they turned round with cowardly bluster and insult upon the man who had delivered them from worse than death. But the son of Pharaoh's daughter, having counted the cost of good work which it was given him to do, was not to be wearied or frightened out of doing it—not even by the discovery that it was all but hopeless. To make a nation, a chosen nation, a peculiar people, a commonwealth of righteousness, out of a horde of slaves, was a noble task. But it was a task in which he who undertook it had to suffer as much affliction, and refuse as much of what is called pleasure, as could well be suffered or refused.

Herein Moses, as the language of this passage suggests, connects himself with Christ. His faith was the faith of Christ. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. —Moses was of the Christian faith. The reproach which Moses preferred to the riches of Egypt was the reproach of Christ—that which He incurred by choosing to be the Saviour, not of a nation, but of the world. He who once said of Himself, "A greater than Solomon is here," more than once advanced His claim to be considered greater than Moses. But the faith of Moses, which was his greatness, was essentially, and only in a lower degree of power the faith of Christ. The choice which the son of Pharaoh's daughter made in his time was the same choice which was made again when He who was rich for our sakes became poor.

It is striking to notice the conjunction here of these two names, the greatest in the history of mankind. A superficial and forcible-feeble account can be and often is given of it, from which we get no lesson worth learning:—it is that, by a marvellous second-sight, Moses anticipated Christ's day, and by faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world was enabled to make his choice. There is a sense, no doubt, in which it is true that Moses, like Abraham, saw Christ's day and was glad. But it was not certainly in the way in which we see it, now that it has been or, rather, is. To fancy that the Old Testament worthies had all the light, or substantially

all the light we have concerning Christ, is to fancy what, in the first place, is very incredible, and what, in the second, distorts and confuses the whole teaching of the Bible. Christ's life is the perfect life. As far as any one in times before He came approached to that life he was a Christian—he saw Christ's day; he believed in Christ; he esteemed the reproach of Christ the greatest of treasures. You remember that passage in the Epistle to the Corinthians about the Israelites in the wilderness and their miraculous supply of water from the rock—"for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." There was a tradition that the rock from which the water gushed at the bidding of Moses wandered with the wandering race. That rock, says the Apostle, glancing at the tradition, was Christ. A continual presentation in the world, and before their eyes, of the divine and eternal, of the Great Father's inexhaustible mercy and grace, that rock to them was a fountain of higher and nobler life than that of sense, as Christ is, or ought to be, to us.

Thus we must read the language which connects Old Testament times and people with the times and with the life and doctrine of Christ. And when we so read it, making due allowance for the symbolism which gives it its colour, it is full of instruction. When Moses took that heroic part which he played so well,—when he gave up worldly grandeur to identify himself with all

that was most despised and downtrodden,—when he refused riches and rank, and made choice of affliction and disgrace, he was not thinking of Christ or faith in Christ. The mystery that was hid from ages and generations was not revealed to him. But for all that he was esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. The reproach of Christ, above all, is not that reproach which Christians have sometimes suffered for avowing their faith—for saying, I believe in Christ. It is that cheerful submission to sorrow and loss and shame and suffering for the good of others in the way of duty and a noble life, of which Christ's is the divine example. There were Christians before Christ. There are Christians where the name of Christ has never been named. Abraham was an eminent Christian; Moses was a Christian still more eminent—more eminent because the trial of his faith was greater; the reproach of Christ which he chose, and which he bore, was harder to suffer. Moses was not only a Christian before Christ; he came as near almost as a man can come to the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, inasmuch as, like Christ himself, he had to be good and do good, he had to be a man, and live a man's true life, at the expense of having to count life-long afflictions great gain, and to turn away as from sin from all that common men call pleasure.

It is a great thing to remember how old Chris-

tianity is—to remember that it is as old as Moses, nay, as old as man. Every true and noble life that was ever lived in this world, no matter where, or when, or how, was Christian. Every noble and generous deed that was ever done since time began was Christian. Above all, every hour of suffering that was ever endured in the way of duty to God and man was Christian. Nor does this make Christianity less or Christ less—it makes them greater. It is only an expression of the fact that Christianity is eternal truth and eternal life.

Let us be followers of all them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Their characters were as various as their faces, or their fortunes, or their names. But they had that in common which makes a man master of himself and of the world—that respect to the invisible and eternal, in the light of which the things of this world, its good and evil, its riches and its afflictions, its honours and its shames, dwindle into insignificance, or at any rate lose their power to sway the mind. Their faith was the faith of Christ; the reproach which they suffered was the reproach of Christ, no matter what they knew or did not know of him. We shall best be followers of them if we look not to them only, but from them to Christ. It is easy to profess faith in Christ, easy to say and to believe—He is the only Saviour of the world; His blood cleanseth from all sin. But if we wish to exhibit, as did Moses, the man of God, the faith of Christ and prove that we esteem the reproach of Christ the

greatest riches, we have something to do besides coming to church and naming the name which Moses never heard. We have to renounce all the pleasures of sin, and many pleasures which are not sins; we have to be ready to give up much that is pleasing to a selfish spirit at the bidding of that charity, which is all the law and the prophets; we have to be willing, for the sake of truth and righteousness, to face loss and reproach and grief and pain. We have no right or title to the sacred name of Christian unless we are prepared—alas, how few of of us are so!—to do again what Moses did, not only to give up the pleasures of sin in order to secure our own salvation, but to give up pleasures which are not sins, and count them sinful, in order to help on the salvation of others. Faith worketh by love—that love which is oftenest repaid in this evil world, not with thanks, but with reproach. If faith in Christ does not lift a man so far above self and the world as to fit him to endure, if need be, some loss and some reproach and some pain for the sake of doing good, it is a faith which may count for much in the church, of which he is a member, but it counts for little in that kingdom of God, of which Moses was a faithful subject, and in which Christ is greater than Moses.

There are two remarks, which I think ought to be made in conclusion.

(1.) As to the relation of Judaism, of which Moses was the founder, and Christianity, which began with Christ. It has been argued that the

faith of Moses was the faith of Christ. How do you account, then, you may ask me, for the difference between Judaism and Christianity? I answer this question by saying that Judaism, or, as many now prefer calling it, Mosaism, was a political as well as a religious system, designed to form families and tribes into a nation, as well as to further the spiritual life of individuals. Much, therefore, that was only good for time and place was mixed up in it with what is not for an age or for a people, but for all time, and all kindreds, and tribes, and all men; customs and observances that were needed to make the people a peculiar people, and keep them separate from the mass of heathen tribes and nations, were blended with ordinances and laws and commandments, in regard to the obligation of which all men are one family and one nation; much, that is to say, that was in its very nature destined to lose its importance, when Israel had fulfilled its calling and its work was done, as a witness to the one true God, was united with much which can pass away only when heaven and earth have passed away. But while Judaism was thus a political as well as a religious system, and the Jew, who was loyal to his faith, was the servant or slave of ordinances and commandments, which have no obligation for us, righteousness was the same thing under Moses as under Christ. It was not as well seen by the Jew as it is, or ought to be, by us, but it was seen that to love God and man, to be true and just and good, rather than to keep

Sabbaths or observe fasts and feasts, is righteousness. If a man broke the laws of God, written in the soul itself, he was not made a good man among the Jews, any more than he would be made a good man among us by keeping all the laws of Moses. The mass of the people might forget this, as the mass of people in Christian countries forget their Christianity; but the prophets, the great and good among the Jews, were well aware of it, and loudly uttered it. Moses, whose faith was that of Christ, did not found a system which was destined to put ages of no faith, or different faith, between himself and Christ. There is but one faith—that which Moses had, and which Judaism, in its own way, inculcated —that faith which is another name for love to God and man.

(2.) Lastly, remark this as to the enjoyment of the world and what are called its pleasures. Many Christian people are much perplexed in their minds on this point. They find it hard to determine how far it is right or wrong to enjoy pleasure. Where to draw the line between lawful and unlawful pleasure is a difficulty which they find great or insuperable. Now one thing which is often said by way of showing where this line is to be drawn is that enjoyment, any enjoyment almost, of the pleasures of the world, takes the mind off from God, interferes with the spirit of devotion, dulls that sense of fellowship with God which ought to be our chief delight. And there

is truth in this. It is true that the giddy round of amusement and pleasure to which a man may give himself if he choose, without putting himself beyond the pale of church or chapel, hardly leaves any room for so great and so sublime a thought as God. But it hardly affords anything in the shape of definite rule or guidance as to what we should and should not call lawful and unlawful among our pleasures, to tell us that we should renounce pleasures in order to be devout. Are we to go as far in this way as monks and hermits have gone, or how far short of that? We are after all left in doubt and uncertainty. But there is one rule as to the enjoyment and the renunciation of what are called pleasures, which is good for practice, and it is that which is suggested to us here: we may safely enjoy pleasures, as long as they do not interfere with our duty as Christians—to be good and to do good; and if there are pleasures, as there are many, which help us to do this duty, we ought to enjoy them. Give up your pleasures and call them sins when they hinder you from doing Christian work. Till then enjoy them with a good conscience, giving God thanks for them. Beware of old wives' fables. Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving. It is the part of the Pharisee, that stranger upon earth who is farthest away from heaven, to enumerate the pleasures of this life which are inconsistent with piety. A good Chris-

tian knows exactly when to call his pleasures sins. They are sins when the enjoyment of them would mean that he is to be idle, or useless, or injurious, or to forget that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but in faith towards God and love towards men.

VII.

PARABLES FOR TWO MULTITUDES.

"It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."—Matt. xiii. 11.

THIS was said to the disciples, and it was the difference between them and the multitude. Christ was speaking to the multitude and to them in parables; and the difference between them and the multitude was that they did, and the multitude did not, understand what He said. "The disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given: . . . Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . . But blessed are

your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

As for the multitude, if you strain Christ's language respecting them, you might say they were punished for their blindness by His making dark to them things which He made clear to others. This has been said. You have heard of judicial blindness—blindness, that is to say, inflicted by God as the punishment of unbelief or other sin. It has been said that this blindness was visited upon the benighted multitude when Christ chose to speak to them in parables. But if this was the case, why did He speak to them at all? Did He wish only a dozen men, or a few dozens, to understand what He said? Did He not wish to instruct the multitude when He took pains to teach them? Was the truth which He taught a charm to be kept back from the many lest it should work good in them? Was Christ afraid too many people would be the better for His doctrine? It is surely nonsense to waste time in arguing that such a supposition is absurd.

If then it was not to hide His meaning from the multitude that Christ taught them in parables, how do you account for His choosing to teach them in that way? To answer this question we have to consider for a moment what a parable is. When Christ spoke the sermon on the mount He spoke without a parable. He told His hearers the truth on that occasion directly, and without

using figures of speech, or any but the simplest. He stated facts; He gave rules and precepts; He commented upon scripture and tradition, and current views of religion; He admonished here and blessed there. He made His meaning plain by the plainness of His speech. And here again, if it were needful, I might remark, that it could not be His intention or desire to keep the multitude in the dark by His parables, else why should He have begun His teaching by the Sermon on the Mount, which is without a parable, and is a marvellous instance of plain speaking. But passing this by, He did, I say, at the beginning of His ministry, and particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, teach without parables.

When He taught thus he gained a few disciples, but the multitude did not heed, or did not like His doctrine. Then He changed His method, and began to use parables. Instead of repeating and repeating—One is your father who is in heaven, He told the story of the Prodigal Son. In place of answering directly the question Who is my neighbour? He told the story of the Good Samaritan. Stories like these, referring to nature or social life, which could be applied, and were meant to be applied, to religious affairs—of these He now made constant use.

Now there is one thing certain as to these stories, that whatever might be His intention in using them, they do clear up things wonderfully. It was no new thing for such stories to be used

by teachers of moral and religious truth. The books of the rabbinical doctors are full of them. Their use was recommended by their fitness to enliven dull doctrine, and to simplify abstruse doctrine. Fables in which birds and beasts talk, allegories in which virtues and vices are personified and speak in character, these as well as parables have been everywhere used to inculcate truth; everywhere used, because by no other means in many cases could truth be so clearly inculcated. It would have taken a long discourse on true piety to show the distinction between it and false piety, which is shown in the Publican and the Pharisee; and what long discourse would have shown it so well? Who that reads the story of the Good Samaritan can imagine an exposition of the subject which would have shed over it an equal amount of light?

Remember this also, in regard to parables like Christ's—they keep close to reality, they reproduce nature and life. Fables and allegories give us purely imaginary circumstances and events; it is, or may be, less an observing and reflective than a creative, possibly a fanciful and crotchety mind which is at work in them; there may be in them much or little of reality, according as there is much or little of any peculiarity of mind; they owe so much to their author that they may owe little to the truth of things; they may teach truth, but also they may commend error, and at any rate they lend themselves almost as easily to the service of a petty

conceit as of a great principle. As compared with these, parables, which are also figures of speech, have this peculiarity—if they do not relate things as they actually happened, they present things as they usually are; if they are not actually true, they are true to the nature of things: they give us as little as possible of the speaker, and as much as possible of reality. If the story of the man who fell among thieves, and was rescued by the good Samaritan, is not a narrative of what actually once happened on the road to Jericho, it is as true as if the thing had happened not once but a million times, since it is true to ordinary observation of things ordinary.

Now if we take all this into account as to the nature of parables, it is possible, I think, to account for Christ's speaking to the multitude in parables, and parables alone. In the first place, possibly there were what we may call considerations of prudence and policy in favour of this way of teaching. Look at the whole set of parables in this chapter; they all relate to the kingdom of God; and one thing they all more or less distinctly intimate, and it is that the establishment of that kingdom must be a work of time. It is like a sower who goes forth to sow; it is like the tares and the wheat which must grow up together until the harvest; it is like the mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds, and becomes a great tree; it is like leaven hid in meal; it is like a net dropped into the sea. This was the idea which was uppermost in Christ's mind—that truth must have time. The multitude

were not untaught—they were disciples of other teachers, — teachers who had filled their minds with all manner of wordy conceits, instead of the eternal verities of religion. The effect of this which was the effect of centuries, was not to be done away in a day. It was not only useless to challenge directly the popular religious teaching and bring on an immediate and decisive conflict with the teachers as well as the taught—with vested interests and inveterate prejudice: it was useless by direct assertion of truth to combat prevailing error. Error, if it is hunted, will turn and find an asylum in the bosom of the pursuer. Error can accommodate itself in the very heart of truth. If it is not endured as solid it will live as gas. Apart from all danger of a conflict with the multitude or their teachers, to combat their error by the direct assertion of truth was useless, if only because in their minds truth was certain to be assimilated to error, not error to truth. The multitude who heard Christ gladly, when they heard His truth, were none the less likely to abide by their error. To do this it was not needful to contradict what He said, a thing which they might not have wished to do; they had only to take His words or some few of capital importance, and put something of their own meaning into them, a thing which they could not help doing. Their ideas of righteousness, truth, goodness, could easily enough be put into the words as they came from His lips. If this was done, they could agree with the Sermon on the Mount, and

admire it from beginning to end, without accepting one truth which it asserted, or abandoning one error which it assailed. You cannot undo in a day the work of centuries as regards modes of faith. If they are wrong, ever so grossly wrong, and are challenged and confuted, they will still answer for themselves, if only in the way of adding to, or subtracting from, or somehow modifying and altering the truth by which they are assailed. Did not many of the Jews who became Christians add their Judaism to their Christianity, with the effect of corrupting one, if not both; the better, if not the worse? Suppose then that Christ had gone on from the beginning, repeating what He said in the Sermon on the Mount, flatly contradicting what the Scribes and Pharisees taught as religion, directly and without a parable inculcating the religion which we call by His name, it is certain that, where He did not provoke strife which would have ended his career as a teacher, He would only have got the multitude to say with Him and say with their other teachers too; to take what He gave them, and add their own to it, and put their own into it, with the effect of making it not His but theirs.

What is easier to imagine than the multitude who had the law and the prophets, and created their Judaism out of them, listening to Christ's sayings on the Sermon on the Mount, and answering, We know all this; this is all written in the law and the prophets; every word of what you say is true; but, then, are we not to mind what the law commands

besides, and what the fathers have further taught us?—are the publicans and sinners, who have no religion, to go into the kingdom of heaven before us or along with us, who fast thrice in the week, give tithes, and pray at the corners of the streets?

As all these parables here suggest to us, time was needed for truth to prevail against error. Direct attack upon it was useless. Christ had tried that and found it unprofitable. And here the parables came in to serve the purpose. They did not assail error or assert truth controversially. Every one could take from them and make of them what he pleased. But there was one thing certain with regard to them, and it was that they were certain to be remembered. They were sure to pass from mouth to mouth, and travel where doctrine however clear, or precept however just, would not reach. The meaning in them now open to the few would remain, and by and by might be perceived by the many. Time would ripen them for the purpose of instructing the multitude as well as the disciples.

And this was their special virtue, that while they were thus fitted to preserve truth from being forgotten, they were above all fitted to preserve truth from being corrupted. Those whose minds were filled with the Pharisees' ideas of religion could hardly help misunderstanding and misrepresenting the doctrinal sayings of Jesus. But it is impossible to corrupt, or sophisticate, or distort the story of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan. You cannot add anything to these stories; you cannot take

anything away from them. You can choose not to heed them if they do not suit your views, but that is all you can do with them. It is impossible to tell them at all, and to do so with doctrinal variations. You cannot take one of them and say, Christ told this story; but there is a text, or a number of texts, in the Old or the New Testament, which must be taken into account along with it, and to qualify it. A parable cannot be qualified like a saying or a body of doctrine. It is a bit of fact, and cannot be qualified by words. It keeps its meaning pure in spite of every effort to corrupt it. It is of kin with nature, which, whatever you may say of it or of any part of it, remains nature still, and is the truth.

And thus it was for one thing Christ spoke to the multitude in parables. His purpose was to teach them truth, but their minds being filled with error, they had to unlearn that first. He spoke in parables, knowing that parables would last, and that while they lasted and were working their work, they would not, because they could not, be corrupted.

Prudence, policy, was thus one thing which recommended the teaching of the multitude in parables. But the great thing was that which distinguishes parables from other figures of speech —that they keep close to reality, to nature, and to life. It was the special vice of the religion of the multitude in Christ's day, that it was wholly artificial, all sacrifice and no mercy. Their teachers taught them for doctrine the command-

ments of men, the thousand and one arbitrary rules about eating and drinking, about fasts and feasts, about offerings, about days, about intercourse with Gentiles, and touching the dead. The scope of Christ's teaching was exactly the opposite of this. He was for mercy, and not sacrifice; for righteousness, and not mint and anise and cummin. It suited His doctrine, therefore, to be taught in parables. Nature and human life are great teachers where mercy, and not sacrifice, is the thing to be taught. The world itself, if your doctrine is mercy, is one great parable ready for your use. Reality of any kind is truth, and all truth, from the lowest to the highest, is one; so that there are books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. The truth of things, begin with it where you will, if you follow it out will lead you up to God. You can make birds and beasts, and virtues and vices talk what you please; but you cannot, if you go to nature and human life, find a parable to fit a lie. Christ chose that form of teaching which brought men face to face with nature and human life, because the men He had to teach, in the matter of their religion, had departed as far as was possible from the truth of things, and had lost themselves in sayings and commandments and traditions, questions and strifes of words. For those whose sound doctrine, drawn from the law and the prophets, was mixed up with endless genealogies, and strifes of words, and quibbles

of ecclesiastical experts—mixed up with all this, and lost—the very thing to be done was not to enter them in another school of doctrine, however sound, but to send them first to the school of nature and life, to unlearn all they had been taught. He set men who had learned only folly from strifes of words to unlearn that folly, and draw wisdom from the observation of things. He said to men who were skilled in sacrifice and had forgotten there was one thing called mercy—"Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice"; and in His parables the school to which He sent them was not the books of this or that teacher, or this or that form of sound words, not even the Bible itself, but nature and life.

In doing this He relied upon the fact that what these teachers teach is not a kind of truth, but the highest truth of all. Their thousand voices are all dumb if you ask them about sacrifice, but they are all eloquent if you question them of mercy. The constant facts of nature, the no less constant facts of human life, yield no testimony to the commandments of men about meats and drinks, about rites, about sabbaths and clerical vestments, but to the law of truth, righteousness, goodness, which is written in a man's heart, they give abundant sanction, and of it they supply abundant illustrations. Fancy a story of nature or human life like the parable of the good Samaritan being invented to prove or illustrate something in regard to one

of the Jewish commandments, about washing of hands before meat, or in regard to one of our disputes about infant baptism, or the wearing of a cope or an alb, or instrumental music in church, or the eastward position of the celebrant. Take one of our controversies between church and church or between party and party in the same church, and tell me where you will send me to nature or to human life for a parable to do for the thing in question what the Prodigal Son does for the mercy of God. Search all nature, subject the facts of human life to the most careful study, and where will you find a vestige of a hint of High Church or Low Church, or Established Church, or Independent Church? But turn to nature and life, to learn something of truth, and righteousness, and goodness, and you will find that of all teachers they are not the least.

Christ then, I say, chose to teach in parables, first of all, because by parables He gave His truth time to grow; and, secondly, because He enlisted nature and human life in His service against prevailing error. He put truth into a form in which it could not perish or be corrupted; He turned His hearers' minds in the direction in which they could soonest unlearn their errors and be prepared to receive His truth.

Now, consider the different effect of His parables upon the multitude and the disciples. As for the multitude, they had first to begin and unlearn everything they believed, before they could perceive

the truth which His parables contained. Before anything in this particular set of parables here as to the kingdom of God could reach their minds, they had to unlearn all that they had learned from their teachers as to the kingdom of God being a Jewish commonwealth, consisting of the twelve tribes of Israel (publicans and sinners excluded), and having for its constitution the numberless commandments of men as to rites and ceremonies. Nothing in these parables of Christ's would have any meaning to their minds, good or bad, till they got rid of that notion. The sower going forth to sow, the tares and the wheat growing up together until the harvest, the grain of mustard seed, the leaven hid in meal, the net dropped into the sea—what had these to tell them of their ideal Jewish commonwealth? They would find no meaning in these, as far as that kingdom of heaven was concerned.

Take other parables and in the same way, to the multitude they must be unmeaning. What could be the meaning, for example, of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, until they had unlearned all their notions as to piety being ceremonial? Why, you can imagine them asking in reference to that parable, what sins was the rich man guilty of? None are specified. Did he not pay his tithes? what offerings did he omit? did he keep some fasts as feasts? did he marry a Gentile? did he refuse alms to the beggar? With their notions derived from the commandments of men, could

they see any point in the story, such as, with your notions derived from the Gospel, you may see?

In short, you have only to take any of our Lord's parables, and then think what the notions of the multitude were, to see that they must have been completely in the dark as to their point. They were not prepared for the light that was in them. It was not light to them, but darkness. Most likely they felt, As long as he spoke plainly to us in sentences and precepts, like those of the rabbis, we knew something of what he meant; but as for these parables, we know not what they mean, or if they mean anything.

This, to be sure, was not to be the final effect of Christ's parables, even upon the multitude. From being brought into this school of nature and life, some of them at least would begin to feel its influence, in turning them away from strifes of words about rites and ceremonies. Contact with reality could scarcely fail in many cases to engender suspicion, and then distrust, of all that was fictitious; and so in the decline of error truth would have its day. But, while, in course of time this might be the effect of the parables upon the multitude, the immediate effect, no doubt, was to confuse and darken their minds. And thus their share in the wretched religious life which had prevailed for centuries, and was wretched because it was content to know nothing better than the right and the wrong of washing of cups and wearing of

phylacteries and giving of tithes,—this wretched religious life—call it their misfortune or their punishment as you will—made it impossible for them to have part or lot in the most glorious religious discovery and revelation that was ever made under heaven.

Turn, on the other hand, to the disciples. They had, at least in part, unlearned the false. They had begun to appreciate the true. They knew, from what they had heard from the great teacher, that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and love. What would these parables in this chapter teach them? Why, to take large, hopeful views of that kingdom; to think it reasonable or certain that, however feeble for a time, it must in the long run be universal, so as to leave nothing under heaven, except what is heavenly; to think that, be the fate of Jew or Gentile what it might, the destiny of mankind is to become the servants of righteousness and the sons of God. To the minds of the disciples, alive already to the value of righteousness and the worthlessness of ceremonial sanctity, how rich in instruction and in comfort the story of the Prodigal Son!—how true and how glorious its representation of the great Father as one who is never so happy as when he has to welcome back to the home of eternal goodness and eternal blessedness the erring and miserable of His children! To their minds again how full of meaning and of comfort, the parable of the Lost Sheep!—the suggestion of the Eternal Righteousness

engrossed, to the neglect of suns and solar systems, in the recovery of one soul which has strayed into the damnation of evil.

Think that these disciples, like the multitude, were Jews, and held, till Christ began to teach, the religious notions of the multitude. Then consider all the certainty and breadth and fulness which these parables of their Master could not but give to their new faith,—faith in God as good, in goodness as man's true life, in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Consider under what a different aspect the world now presented itself to their minds, from that in which it had once been seen by themselves, and was still seen by the multitude; consider the new heavens and the new earth, the universe of righteousness and goodness, opened above and around them—consider this, and you can surely understand something of what Christ meant when He said to His disciples in reference to these parables, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear"; and also when he added, "For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." When was there so clear, so full revelation made of God as great, and of goodness — God's glory and man's life—being finally triumphant, as was made in these parables, to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear? Not among Jews till then; not among Gentiles since then.

I conclude with two remarks, the first of which is, that not one religion, but every religion, that of Christ included, is apt, in the common mind, to degenerate into ceremonialism and strifes of words. And, in that case, what professes to be light becomes the grossest of darkness. It was not for an age, therefore, but for all time, that Christ spoke in parables to the multitude. These parables of His, bringing us into contact with nature and human life, furnish us with a resource of inestimable value against the prevalence of irreligion, error, infidelity, not only in the world, but in the church. Texts from any part of the Bible, even the Sermon on the Mount itself, opinions of fathers and of councils, views of reformers and founders of sects, may be quoted this way or that, sometimes to fortify truth, possibly at other times to prop up error. Systems of doctrine resting upon these foundations may be systems of mistakes, if to one age an embodiment of eternal truth, to another a relic of some obsolete mode of thought. Conventional forms of piety, like conventional modes of belief, may vary from age to age, and range through every degree of irrationality and frivolity. But at any rate there is this to be said for the grounds on which we profess, at least profess, to build our Christian faith, that among them there always remain these parables of Christ to bear the witness of reality and of eternity to the supreme importance of being and of doing good, and of believing in God, not as the Friend of the Jew or the Gentile,

or of this or that denomination of Christians, but as the Father of all men, and as the Saviour and Redeemer and Hope and Dwelling-place of all who love good and hate evil.

In this sense the parables which were for the multitude, when the disciples were few, are for the disciples when they are a multitude. Ages pass and the disciples of Christ like the disciples of other masters, with reference to His sayings, and sayings of His inspired apostles, lose themselves in doctrinal discussions, strifes of words, to which things answer doubtfully or not at all. Theology, which is fashionable science, usurps the place of religion, which is eternal truth. The pedagogues, whose business it is to bring us to Christ, revealing the Father of all, lead us to the fathers of the Church, contending among themselves. For modes of faith it is obvious to common sense that senseless bigots fight, and they alone. Thus the parables are the salt of Christianity to preserve it from corruption and extinction ; they recall us from all this barren or disgraceful war of words to the sterling virtue of the Good Samaritan, and the substantial goodness of the Prodigal's father.

Again, I remark, the blessedness of Christian belief is that it is a vision of the universe as undivided. What did the disciples, who were blessed in their seeing, see ? When it was given to them, as it was not given to the multitude, to understand these parables, what did they hear and comprehend ? It was not that their own souls were to

be saved; it was not that the Jews were to be converted, or the Gentiles to be visited by Christian missionaries. It was, that the kingdom of God, the Father and Saviour of all men, is eternal; that evil here and everywhere is temporary, and good alone is for ever and ever. Miserable the man whose creed is less than this, or different from this; blessed is the man whose hope in this manner and in this measure is in the Lord Almighty and Everlasting!

VIII.

GODS MANY AMONG CHRISTIANS.

"With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward."—Psalm xviii, 25, 26.

DAVID wrote this psalm, as the inscription over it tells us, to celebrate his triumph over Saul. At last justice was done between him and his chief enemy. He who had striven to do his duty to his God and to his country was rewarded with honour and wealth and power. He who had fallen away from faith and virtue, and kingly honour and integrity, had been overtaken by disgrace, and then by death. Saul was dead. David reigned in his stead over the house of Israel. The new king, therefore, in saying what he says here, was glancing, no doubt, at what we call the ways of Providence; was thinking how it comes to pass in the long run that wrong is righted, and justice done between man and man. And as often as

we have observed, in our lives or in others' lives, right conduct issuing in happiness, and wrong conduct resulting in loss and misery; so often have we seen the truth illustrated that to the upright man God is upright, and to the froward He is froward. But it is by no means alone or chiefly in this respect that the truth is truth. It is not every Saul who is killed or commits suicide. It is not every regal head like David's which has to be measured for a crown. Honesty is not always the best policy; virtue is not always its own reward in respect to houses and lands and a carriage and pair. There is many a villain on whom the sun of his prosperity shines gaily till his eyes close in the shadow of that last adversity which overtakes us all, honest men and rogues together. It is only in a rough sort of way at the best that distinction is made by Providence, in the way distinction was made between Saul and David, between the upright and the froward. No doubt in the long run, and on a great scale, it is true that the issues of righteousness are different from the results of vice and wickedness. Take not a man here and there, but the world into view; take nations as well as families and individuals into account, and you will have no difficulty in seeing that with the same regularity and certainty with which suns and planets fulfil their courses in the heavens moral causes produce their effects on earth. The balance of justice, though it swings slowly, is just. The hope of the evildoer is

belied, the desire of the just blossoms in due season.

It is only however, I say, in a rough sort of way at the best, as far as observation of individuals will carry us, that we see distinction made by Providence between the upright and the froward. But, as no one knew better than the author of this psalm, it is not to the fortunes of men, but to their whole experience as rational and spiritual beings, that we have to look in order to see how true it is that God shows Himself to every man according to what every man is.

In the first place, our life is experience of God ; for in Him most literally we live and move and have our being. That whole system of things in which we are placed here, and of which we are a part, with all the sorts of good and the sorts of evil, the kinds of happiness and the kinds of misery, that belong to it, is of God and from God. There may be doubts as to what is, and what is not, of God in regard to a written word, which claims to be His; but if we find that life led this way is different from life led that way, that this set of actions has one result and that set has another—this, as far as it goes, is a most authentic and indubitable revelation to us of God. The arrangements by which things are as they are in regard to human life—I do not mean this man's life or that man's, but the life of mankind—are arrangements in which God is present, and in which He shows Himself as much, to say the least, as in the arrangements by which

plants draw sustenance from the soil, and suns and systems fulfil their mighty courses.

To say, therefore, that life is different to different men, above all as they differ in point of spiritual character, is to say, that God shows Himself to them as so many different gods. To an honest man life is different from what it is to a rogue; different to a merciful man from what it is to a churl or a miser; different to a pure man from what it is to a sot or a debauchee. Apart altogether from the consequences of this life in another, apart also from particular notable events to which we would perhaps give the name of providential, life, which is experience of God, is different to all these. No confusion ever takes place among them, so that the experience which belongs to one falls to the lot of another. There is no defect or hitch in the arrangements by which these different sorts of lives are kept as distinct from each other as species of plants, or species of animals. It is absurd to suppose a kind man having an unkind man's experience—just as absurd as it would be to say that a black man and a white man have the same skin.

To take the illustration which is nearest at hand —David would have had a different experience from Saul whether he had, or had not, got Saul's place. Put Saul in David's place, or David in Saul's, their experience would not have been substantially changed, would not have been made a bit more similar. The one man, as we know, could be

supremely wretched with a kingdom for his possession ; the other, as we may judge, could have been eminently happy with a shepherd's crook; and whether he was king, or whether he was shepherd, mattered little to either, so long as each was what he was as regards certain great features of character. The life of each man was different; his experience of God was different, according to the difference of those features.

This song of triumph would have been a blunder, if its author had been such another man as Saul, for, in that case, he would have celebrated his own misery more than another man's fall ; in that case, he would have been at once king over Israel and the most wretched man in the country. Suppose, on the other hand, he had failed in the ambition which took him from his father's house, and from his shepherd's life, and Saul or Saul's sons had reigned over Israel till his death, he would have borne that disappointment of his hopes, and that disaster to his fortunes, not as Saul, but as David ; not with a mean man's lamentations, but with a brave and good man's patience and magnanimity. However it may have appeared to David himself at this moment, no one reading his life now can say that he was any the luckier for his triumph over Saul, and his elevation to the place in which Saul was wretched ; on the contrary, it would seem only too clear that, if David had never been king, and had never had occasion to write such a psalm as this, neither would he ever have been the criminal that

he became, or have written psalms in which the agonies of the human heart find their fiercest utterance. It is not, indeed, going too far to say that, if Saul's enmity to David was anything but a part of a fitful disease, and if we could suppose the first king of Israel in that last hour of his blackened fortunes, when death was precious to him, breathing a desire that his enmity might take effect after his breath was gone, he could not have wished a more malignant wish than that David should be the man to occupy his place. No two men could have had a more different experience in their lives; but the difference, such as it was, we can see, was in themselves—not made by their fortunes, but by their characters; not by the events of peace or war, but by the quality of mercy in the one case, and of wilfulness in the other. To the merciful man God was merciful; to the wilful man He was wilful.

Thus justice is done between man and man, where justice is sure, and where it is perfect—in themselves. Many good people at the present time are haunted by an alarm which is altogether visionary. Afraid lest too hopeful and cheerful religious views and opinions should prevail and do harm, they urge upon us, with anxiety in their hearts and in their faces, that if you do away with eternal punishment, in many cases of sin and iniquity there will be no punishment at all. Look, they say, how many who live vicious lives know nothing of remorse! If there be no such thing

as eternal torture for these there is no punishment; if there be no hell there is no harm.

But is not this, to say the least of it, an astonishingly narrow view to take of the field of human experience? There is much more remorse, or something like it, of course, in peoples' hearts than they wear upon their sleeves. Many a man who wears a smiling enough face, if you could get behind that mask, would show you grim enough features. I am persuaded, for my part, that much of the outrageous, reckless dissipation in drink and other things, which hurries multitudes to untimely graves, is dissipation which, if we knew the secrets of men's hearts, could be traced to this very thing, remorse, bad conscience, or whatever you like to call it, which is supposed to be so uncommon. It is a proverb that people drown care in drink. That care which is thus miserably drowned is often enough, I believe, that blackest care of all—a bad conscience. Men have to take refuge from themselves, worst exile under heaven, and often the nearest and best refuge they can find is to go mad. Drunkenness is the cause of vice; but vice, too, is the cause of drunkenness. At the same time, I grant readily that if what is called remorse were all the difference between man and man on the score of character, the difference might seem to be trifling. It is the best natures and not the worst which have most acquaintance with remorse. A good man falls into sin, and he knows what remorse is and what hell

is. We know to a certainty that there was some good thing even in Judas Iscariot, if only because he had remorse and went and hanged himself. But let any man, John or Judas, go far enough in vice and sin, have long enough acquaintance with these, and one thing is certain, remorse will not haunt him much. The wicked have no bands in their death. Consciences, which ought to burn, are seared; they should be live coals, and they are white cold ashes. I grant all this. No one who knows anything of the world can be ignorant of this or dispute it. But is there nothing besides remorse in question as between life and life? Is there no fruit of the tree of evil except one, which itself shows the tree to have been grafted upon good? Surely when good people are alarmed, and say, If there is no remorse and no hell, no difference is made between man and man, but there is one event to all, and life as well as death is one, their alarm is vain. Apart altogether from remorse, and everything like it, and in the nature of things, and everywhere and always, it is one thing to be upright and another to be wilful, it is one thing to be a kind man and another to be an unkind, one thing to be pure and another to be impure. The good of being good is in being so, and not in having no remorse; and the evil of being evil is in being so and not in having remorse. Why will people so constantly forget this, or overlook it? A stupid and uncultivated man, who has never seen a picture in his life, if you take him into the

National Gallery, rich in the glories of art, will have no remorse, though the spectacle affords him no pleasure, or though any pleasure which he has is due rather to the gilded frames that glitter before him than to the finest pictures they contain. He will have no remorse—he will not blame himself, or despise himself, or hate himself, for being dull where he ought to be delighted. But then you would not say that his ignorance and his stupidity cost him nothing; you would not allow it to be supposed that he is no loser as compared with some man who has but to enter your gallery of pictures to be transported with delight; to have hours, days, years of his life made brighter by the impressions left upon his mind; to feel that there is wealth in the world, and that the best, in which he, however poor he may be, has his share, or, rather, which is all his own.

A man who has no children, or who, having children, cares for them only in a cool impassive way, has no remorse if he sees children at play and cannot laugh with them, nor feel that their laughter, like the sunshine and the song of birds, and the fall of waters, and the splendour of the nightly heavens, is part of the great ministry of nature ministering poetry and sweetness to man's heart and life—he has no remorse, no shame, no bad conscience; but is he no loser by his lack of feeling as compared with the man to whom, even in his age, the voices of children can restore something of the gladness of his youth?

I know that you cannot properly speak of remorse in such cases at all. But suppose you could, are they not similar to cases of righteousness and unrighteousness, of good and evil? Too often the man who is neither merciful nor kind nor pure, has no more of a bad conscience than the man who is all three; but it does not follow that he does not lose anything which a different man gains. It is not only what a bad man suffers, but what he does not and cannot enjoy, that you must take into account when you compare him with a good man. Of suffering, in one form or another, we all are partakers, and man for man, I do not know that there is not as much suffering (though of a different kind) on the side of the good as on that of the evil. But it is different as to what a good man and a bad can enjoy: the good man's advantage here is not open to a doubt. Take a greedy man of the world, too common in the church, a man who, perhaps, prays daily in the name of Christ, and daily blasphemes the doctrine of Christ, inasmuch as Christ has said that it is more blessed to give than to receive, while he acts steadily upon the principle that the most blessed of all things is to take as much as you can get, and give as little as you can. He is, perhaps, just the last man in the world who would ever dream of accusing himself of anything wrong. He will tell you he never did any one any harm. He has always paid his debts. He never forged a bill; never stole; never swore; never was drunk. Remorse! why should you mention such

a thing to him? But, suppose all this to be true, would any one, who takes an intelligent view of things, compare, for a moment, in point of real good and happiness, the life of such a man, shut up in himself, narrowed and bounded by himself, with the life of some kindly, generous, big-hearted man, to whom it is a joy to do a deed of kindness or speak a word of encouragement and sympathy, whose neighbour's gladness is his own, who lives in the lives of all his friends and acquaintances, and is gladdened by all that gladdens them?

Suppose, again—no uncommon case—a man of impure life, without any acquaintance with remorse. Would any one, who knows really what human life is, and what are its poorest pleasures and satisfactions on the one hand, and what are its richest and best on the other—would any one who knows this, compare the life of such a man, a slave to his appetites, at war with his reason, forced by the tyranny of what is animal to forego more and more of what is human and spiritual,—would any one, who takes a sensible, not to say a lofty, view of things, compare the life of such a man with that of a pure-minded man—I do not mean a stupidly innocent man, or a mechanically virtuous man—but a man who fervently loves all things innocent and pure and good—man's courage and strength of purpose, woman's modesty and grace, the simplicity of children, home and kindred, the sights and sounds of nature, honesty in trade, truth of

speech, gentleness in the strong and great, patience in the weak and suffering?

It is not that these different men have here and there, at odd moments, different or contrary experiences, but that the world in which each lives is a wholly different world. I do not know what sort of world it is in which other creatures than man live, and move, and have their being; but I do know that there are different worlds in which men live, so that what is day to some is night to others, or rather, so that to some there is little day, and to others there is little night. I do know, for certain, that he who loves righteousness and truth and goodness, would think that fate the cruellest of all possible which condemned him to be a rogue or a hypocrite.

It is true, then, that for different men life is a different experience, and true also that, as we live, and move, and have our being in God, different men have different experience of Him,—that to the upright He is upright; to the merciful, merciful; and to the froward, froward.

And is not this which the Psalmist says exactly what Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Forgive and ye shall be forgiven. Judge not, that ye be not

judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Every tree is known by its fruit"? There is, I repeat, no more confusion among men in regard to their experience of the world and God, than there is in nature among trees or flowers—no more in an unmerciful man's life can you gather a merciful man's experience, than you can gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. Among the good on the one hand, among the evil on the other, none even of the nicest shades of character are lost in all the seeming confusion of earthly things; but the meek have their experience, and the proud have theirs, and the pure have theirs, and the unforgiving and unkind and ungenerous have theirs. In being what he is, whether good or evil, and irrespective of all that may happen to him here or hereafter—so the Eternal Justice has decreed—every man has his reward.

And in this point of view, we see how it is that, just as the best and blessedest goodness is that which is, so to speak, natural, unconscious, not constrained by any law or fashioned by any rule, but free, spontaneous love to God and man, which flows unbidden in a good man's heart, so the cursedest evil is not that which is attended by remorse—an end which might be a beginning; but it is that dulness and deadness of soul in which a man is condemned, if he enjoys anything, to enjoy only what is of the earth earthy.

There is no occasion for the alarm of good men lest justice should fail, if all stories of God's mercy be true. Justice is done, though every man in God's great vineyard, whatever his hours of labour, whatever his strength, receive from the hand of Infinite Beneficence his penny; his pennyworth is all his own, and is exactly according to his worth or worthlessness. The Eternal Justice does not secrete itself, a black shadow, in eternity, to receive us when this life is done, and place it in the scale; it is the air our souls breathe and the light in which all things in heaven and earth are seen by them; and it is to every soul what every soul is. To the merciful, God is merciful; to the froward, froward.

Thus, in the first place, because life is experience of God, to different men God is different. But I hasten now to remark that, to different men, He is also different as an object of study and reflection.

On many other subjects, or rather on most, if people agree they do agree, and if they differ they differ, and there is an end of it. That the earth is a planet, that a high mountain is sublime, that temperance is a virtue—if people agree about any of these things they do agree. But it is different with regard to the highest object of human thought —God. People may agree, and do agree, in their language respecting Him, who have little or nothing in common in their thought and meaning.

In point of fact, I venture to say, in the first place, among us, who all profess the same creed,

there are Gods many and Lords many. Wesley, the pious founder of Methodism, it is said, remonstrated with Whitfield as to his ideas of God, telling him "your God is my devil." And is it not obvious that something of the same sort might be said by sets of Christians at the present day to other sets? Could any two beings be more unlike each other than those two, who are called God—on the one hand by some member of a Christian sect, perhaps one of the obscurest of all sects, who fancies that out of his sect there is no salvation—that is to say, fancies that God has condemned all but himself and a handful of others, no better men than himself, to everlasting torment: and, on the other hand, by one of those Christians, who hope and believe that all evil in all the world will yet be turned to good, and God, who is good, be all in all?

I will go farther than this, and say that not only is it plain to thoughtful observers that it is not one and the same God we all believe in; but that the God of ordinary prevalent orthodox ways of thinking must be in the very nature of things, and to a greater or less extent, a God in whom we ought not to believe. This may seem a rash assertion. But look what there is to countenance it, for example, in the history of Judaism. Could any notions of God be more silly and preposterous to our minds than those which, as we learn from His own exposure of their absurdity, were the orthodox notions among our Lord's countrymen

in His time? They had the law and the prophets from which to draw their theology; and the theology which they drew, as compared with that of Moses, or David, or Isaiah, was simple nonsense. Turn to other religions and you find the same thing. Buddhism and Hindooism are one thing in the sacred books, and another thing altogether in the common mind. Whatever may be written about God in sacred books, or in creeds and confessions of faith, common modes of thinking, the ideas and sentiments of the great mass of ordinary minds, must always modify, or rather shape the common beliefs about God. It is not what the best and greatest minds have been able in their most inspired moments to think about Him, but what the mass of men can think, and do think of Him at all hours, that embodies itself in our common systems of doctrine, at any-rate in the sense in which they are commonly held. And for this reason, the mass of men being what they are, more or less selfish and earthly, not to say ignorant and unthinking, it follows that there is always danger, no matter what your written creed is, of the God of ordinary beliefs being that of a selfish and earthly mind. I mean to say that there is a danger that what the church actually thinks and believes about God, as distinct from what it professes to believe, may be something to be denied rather than believed. A staunch Protestant would readily admit this with reference to that large part—much the

largest part—of the Christian Church which calls itself Catholic. He would freely allow that a God to whom prayers for the dead may be addressed by a priest, and to whom prayers for the living should be offered in the name of the Virgin, is another God than his, and than that of his church. If he were an intelligent and reflective man, as well as a staunch Protestant, he might say to himself—It is strange but true, as Catholics would contend, that, Catholic and Protestant, we have the same Bible, and hold, and have always held, the same great articles of faith. But look to what is religion among ignorant Catholic Spaniards, or ignorant Catholic Irishmen, and what is religion among educated English Protestants, and say if it is the same, or even similar; tell me if it is the same God we all believe in. A Protestant might say this, and a Catholic be offended by his saying it. But the truth is, though probably there are few in any church who would admit it, the danger is not in one church, or one part of the world, Catholic or Protestant, but in every church, and all over the earth, lest there should be set up as God, an idol, the work of men's hands, the creation not of genius, or heroism, or inspired magnanimity, but of the feeble and vain, and sordid and earthly mind; and it is perhaps not going too far to say that there is no church, our own included, in which some such idol does not attract the crowd.

There are churches, I know, whose confession

of faith is our own, but whose God, as far as I can judge what He is from the general religious sentiments of their adherents, their opinions as to other churches, and the world and human life, I for my part do not believe in; with regard to whom I am certain, at any rate, that He is not the same as the God of whom I have learned anything from Jesus Christ.

Can any one think of some of our great ecclesiastical wars—like the Disruption of the Scotch Establishment, for example—and calmly, at some distance of time, estimate the real importance of the things which were at stake, and the questions which were in dispute, and not feel that those who on the one side or on the other spoke and acted as if the government of the Eternal were laid upon their shoulders, and as if His kingdom upon earth must stand or fall with them, must have had notions of Him very different from others which have been derived by pious minds and great minds in other places, and at other times, from the words of Christ and the commentaries of St. Paul?

Is it not, in fact, the misery of most of those great agitations that convulse churches at intervals, and end in the establishment of new sects, with new names, that there is roused about some comparatively insignificant question—it always is comparatively insignificant—all the feeling of which a roused multitude are capable; that that feeling, of course, enters into and gives its tone

and colour to the life of the sect which owes its birth to it; that, again, the church life which is thus produced produces its own theology, its own God; and to the merciful church, as to the merciful man, God is merciful; to the angry church He is jealous and wrathful; to the Pharisaic church He is no friend of publicans and sinners?

All this, if it be so, is due to the fact which we have here expressed by the Psalmist, that to different minds God is different. As an object of thought as well as a matter of experience, He is so. A man's creed may influence his life, but his life must influence his creed. We cannot pass judgment with regard to our fellow-men, without showing what we ourselves are. The man whose own life is evil, suspects all other men of the evil to which he is inclined. The good man does not doubt but that God, who made him, made others as good as he. And in the same way, all sorts of men, according to their sorts, judge God. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The man who has no love for his fellow-man, has no love in him—hard, therefore, for him to believe in love, if you make it infinite and eternal, and call it God. Men who cannot forgive, men who cannot pity, men who cannot lend hoping for nothing again, cannot have a God except in their own image. In fact, every man's God must be himself, only on a greater scale. He who loves righteousness, and

truth, andgoodness more than life, will have a God whose life is righteousness, and truth, and goodness. He who loves gain, and pleasure, and mastery over others, will have a God who is arbitrary in his acts, shifty in his character, stern and oppressive in his government. The servant who hides his master's talent in the earth, the proud and wilful man to whom duty is disgusting, has for his God a hard man reaping where he has not sowed, and gathering where he has not strawed. Through all the different shades of human character, even the faintest and finest, it is the same; each has its own God. A man cannot rise above his own level, and attribute to God that which is not in himself. Get every living man to subscribe one confession of faith, and as far as it concerns God, each man will subscribe it in a different sense. For, search the world and books, even the Bible itself, how we will, if God is to be found, or known, or seen anywhere, it must be in our own souls. God is a spirit, not confined to temples, not bound up in books, not coffined in ancient creeds; but in that spirit with which He has endowed us, we must and we do find him, and in that alone, or above all—merciful to the merciful; to the pure, pure; to the froward, froward.

Here, then, if nowhere else, is reward and punishment. There is that in man which does not admit of his disowning God altogether in his way of thought, however he may disown Him in his manner of life. It is a necessity of human nature to have a God. If there are beings in human shape

who have no idea of God, they can scarcely be called human. To be condemned then to think of God, as some men think of Him, and must think of Him, their life being stronger than their creed, not as a being to be loved, but as one to be feared or hated—this is punishment. If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness? If your religion is night, where is your day? If God is a bugbear, what is your life? To have a religion, and that not something which lightens up the world, and life, and death, and things present and things to come, with the smile of the Eternal Friendship, but which sits heavily upon all natural joy, and darkens the misery of man's few and evil days upon the earth with the suspicion of years of evil without end beyond — this is punishment. What other gain, or reward, or happiness, on the other hand, would you desire, than the religion of Christ—to love righteousness and truth and goodness with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and to believe that God, who is over all, and is the Beginning and the End of all, is all that you love; to pity and believe in a pity which comprehends all that lives and breathes; to wish for the good of all men in this world and the next, and to trust in the Almighty, to whom that good must be precious; to feel that our little life is not bounded by endless realms of chaos and old night, peopled with shapes of fear and horror, but is islanded in the deep of the Eternal Charity and Kindness; to doubt and yet

more to trust; to feel that much is the mystery of man's existence and God's ways, but that to live and breathe is to hope good, ay, abundance of good, for all that live and breathe from the Source and Fountain of life and all our gladness. What other reward, gain, happiness, would you have than that? Christianity is a sorry gain, I admit, to many who profess it, except it be the only escape from the bottomless pit, and from the lake of fire and brimstone. It is a sorry gain to those, and they are many, whose notion is that something which God can give them, or some place in which he can put them, will be heaven. But that which makes God Himself our heaven is great gain, without reference to any life but this. With this a man might live and die, and doubt if he is to live again, and with his last breath bless God:—the merciful man's God, and his exceeding great reward.

I have but to add then, last of all, as the practical lesson which we get from all this—a man may change his church and his creed, and not change his God; but he changes his God when he changes his life. To find God what God ought to be to us, and what He was to David, to Abraham, to Isaiah, to Paul, what we have to do is to order our lives in righteousness. Let us by trying to do the will of God in our daily life, learn of the truth whether it be of God. Otherwise we shall never learn it. If we would know God and delight ourselves in Him, we must not be satisfied to say what is commonly said, or think what is commonly

thought, or believe what is commonly believed and preached about him. By daily doing of His will—that is to say, by daily doing all our duty, all that we know to be right and good; by sincerity of speech, by honest and faithful work; by forgiveness of injuries, and of ignorance and folly; by kindness, by charity, let us try rather to raise ourselves out of those narrower and meaner views of Him, which do, and must always prevail no less in the church than in the world. There are many good people who are afraid of nothing so much as any inquiry on religious subjects, any thinking for oneself. But just on these, if on no other subjects, every man must think for himself if he is to think at all. Each man must be his own instructor as to God, and his life must be his great book. The merciful man, the pure man, the froward man, as far as he thinks at all about God, thinks for himself; each must school himself in divinity at his own expense and in his own school. There is a class of religious books which pretend to be the only safe or profitable ones to be put into the hands of old or young, and which are regarded as such by a great many. In this, perhaps the most popular of all classes of books, I find a few familiar, and, I will call them, pitiful ideas of God constantly reiterated, while all those grander ideas of Him, which make the Bible the best of books, all those ideas of Him which are to be derived from the study of science, or from the course of history, the ideas, in fact, of a modern and enlightened age, are systematically ignored or

solemnly tabooed. Yet many good people, afraid to trust themselves, or to trust their children to make any inquiry on religious subjects, religiously restrict their reading to this class of books. On the greatest of all subjects, good people thus condemn themselves and their children to eternal poverty of mind. Were it not better if we all felt that whether in books which record the experience of others, or in our own lives, or in science, or in nature, or in the Bible, we are free—rather we are bound—to seek to know Him, whom to know is life everlasting. Whether we will or no, God will be different to different men's thought; but that each man should think for himself, and should think freely, rather than according to some common notions—this, if anything is sacred or certain, is certain and sacred. Poorer, more irrational, more superstitious notions about God, it would not be possible to find anywhere on the face of the earth, than are common among ourselves, and, I will venture to say, are commonly enough preached among us. If reading will help us, if thinking for ourselves will help us to rise above these notions, rise above them we should. And what is certain is—and this again is the great lesson of my text—to live after the example of Christ, not only to do no harm, but to do good, to devote our life to the highest ends of living—this will help us to rise above them, so that to us, whatever He may be to others, the Merciful will be merciful, the True will be true, the Upright will be upright, the Pitiful will be compassionate.

IX.

THE FEW AND THE MANY.

"Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." 1 Cor. i, 26.

THERE is a great difference between a historical statement and a doctrinal one, which, great as it is, is not always noticed. At any rate, statements in the Bible which are plainly historical, are not seldom construed as if they were doctrinal. It is very easy to explain the difference. A historical statement tells you something which is true with reference to a particular place or time. A doctrinal statement tells you what is always and everywhere true. Thus, for example, it is a historical statement to say that our Lord appointed twelve aposties, and invested them with the authority which He claimed for Himself—historical because it refers to a particular time, and, except with reference to that time, is unintelligible or unmeaning. On the other hand, it is

a doctrinal statement that Christ is the Head of the Church—doctrinal because it tells you not what is true of one time, or one place, but always and everywhere true.

Now, of course, if there is all this difference between these two kinds of statement, it must often be a grave, often a most ridiculous blunder, to take the one for the other.

Take, for example, the historical statement just mentioned, viz., that Christ delegated His authority to apostles; give to it a doctrinal sense; make it a doctrine or rule as to the seat of authority and government among Christians—it would require you, of course, to have a set of men always holding the position which the twelve apostles held; that is to say, it would oblige you to attempt what, in the very nature of things, is impossible. You might elect twelve men to be apostles in your Church; others might elect twelve to be apostles in theirs, but none of these different sets of apostles would occupy the place which the first twelve companions of the Master filled.

Now, here is a statement in this epistle which has been often taken as if it were doctrinal, though it is, in fact, historical, and the result is no less absurd, and it is much more mischievous, than if you were to insist on having twelve apostles and a Judas among them now, because there were once twelve, and one of them had a devil—"Ye see your calling, brethren, how that

not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

Every statement of this kind, and, indeed, every statement whatever in the Bible, is regarded by some readers as not only true when it was written, but always and everywhere true; true, that is to say, not historically, but doctrinally. And if it is taken in this way, this text means that there are certain classes of men in all civilized societies who, from the very nature of things, and as a matter of course, reject the religion of Christ.

Any one, however, who seriously considers it even for a moment, must shrink from entertaining the idea that any classes of society, and especially those particular classes here mentioned, are in this position. In the first place, if it were found that these classes are always and everywhere to be reckoned among the unchristian and unbelieving, thoughtful men of all other classes would, on that account alone, hesitate to embrace the Gospel. It is quite true that the most erudite scholars, the ablest philosophers, the most acute and most advanced thinkers, the whole tribe of wise men, are often enough prejudiced and mistaken, proved to be so by their disputes among themselves; but undoubtedly if we found that all, or nearly all the clever and educated men of our day, all, or nearly all the members of those classes of society that enjoy the best opportunities of culture and inquiry—if we found, I say, all, or almost all, these ranged on one side as regards

Christianity, viz., that of unbelief; and if only the mob of ill-taught, superstitious, unthinking people were to be met on the other side, in exact proportion to his intelligence, it would be difficult for an intelligent man to be a Christian.

The wittiest of our English kings is reported to have said that Presbyterianism was not fit to be the religion of a gentleman. And that may or may not be so—much depends upon what your notion of religion is, and what is your idea of a gentleman. But if Christianity were only fit to be the religion of the vulgar and uneducated mob, its prospects in this world would be poor, especially as it is to be hoped the education of the people will not suffer from having at last in various countries been made a national affair.

Again, of course, if this statement were doctrinal, if it meant that never are the wise, or mighty, or noble called, then, supposing Christianity and salvation to be names for anything of superlative value, it is a misfortune for the world if what we call civilization advances. Each generation more nearly than its predecessor approaches to the condition of the privileged classes of society —the wise, the mighty, the noble. "The process of the suns," in regard to privileged and non-privileged classes, is one of levelling-up. Peaceful commerce and progressive art and science give more and more to the many the advantages, both mental and social, which have been the exclusive possession of the few. Where there was one man

with a little knowledge of philosophy or science fifty years ago, there will soon, it is to be hoped, be a hundred with much. In place of one king, and a few knights and warlike barons, once a nation's complement of the mighty, there are, and will be, many great men, great in virtue of intellect and character, and of the influence, more commanding and enduring than that of sceptre or coronet, which intellect and character confer. Now, all this is dire misfortune and calamity, if the effect is to be that the number of those who reject Christianity is to be increased, the number of those who accept it diminished, if it is always to be true that the wisdom of the wise and the greatness of the great must stand in the way of their salvation.

These are some, and only some, of the objections which immediately occur, if you take this statement of my text as doctrinal.

On the other hand, consider it as historical, and it is plain enough. Look back for a moment to the time when this epistle was written, glance at the state of things then existing among the people to whom it was written, and you not only see that what is here said might be true, but you understand why it was true. You see not only how it might possibly happen that those classes here mentioned were not attracted to Christianity, but you see how inevitable it was they should be repelled by it.

We still sometimes hear explanations given of

how it is that the learned and the great and the noble are not Christians, but in the first place these explanations account for what is not the fact, for there are as many Christians—that is to say, good men—among cultivated and aristocratic people as in any other class ; and, in the second place, these explanations, as a rule, would not account for the fact, if it were one. It is nonsense, for example, to say that wise men are conceited, and in their conceit reject Christianity, because it is simple, or because it is supernatural. The truth is, as regards conceit, it is biggest not with those who have some knowledge, but with those who have none. If I wanted to discover the most conceited man in this parish, or this county, I should inquire first of all for the most ignorant man in it, and very likely I should find that he was the very man I wanted.

But be this as it may, if we glance at the world, or that part of it with which we have to do in this epistle at the time my text was written, it is easy to understand why certain classes, and just those very classes here specified, were more reluctant than others to embrace Christianity.

We have first, then, the "wise men after the flesh," with regard to whom there has been heard in our time so much futile declamation, against whom every ignorant fanatic who occupies a pulpit thinks it necessary to lift up his indignant heel.

Now, with regard to this class, let me say, first

of all, that in dealing with them we have nothing whatever to do with the great sages of antiquity, the illustrious poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome, whose wisdom has been the wonder and delight of civilized mankind for more than twenty centuries. It would certainly not be anything to boast of on the side of Christianity if we had to suppose that it rejected them, or they it. It would be nothing in favour of Christianity to have to say that the wisdom of which they were the oracles had nothing in common with that wisdom of God, of which this Apostle professed to be the mouthpiece. It were only to be wished, indeed, that the majority of people in our Christian Churches had attained to as lofty, as enlightened, as Christian ideas of the order and government of the universe, of life, and duty, and destiny, as some of these men, seekers after truth in the golden age of Greek wisdom, entertained and taught. There is no question raised here about these great sages and their relation to the faith which we profess; it is certainly not said that they were not called. As every intelligent man knows, this was not the golden age of Greek literature and philosophy, in which the Apostle Paul flourished and wrote letters to Greek readers; that age was long past; the memories of it had grown dim and faint. We have to do here with the men of a degenerate time, not thinkers thinking their best and truest in an earnest age, but the tribe of smatterers, would-be wise men, critics,

sophists, pretenders to universal knowledge, which is often largest and loudest where ignorance and frivolity divide between them the empire of the human mind.

This is one thing we have to note with regard to these "wise men after the flesh." On the other hand, we have to remember that, as they were not the great sages of antiquity, so they were not savants, and scholars, and thinkers of our modern type. We hear the name "wise men after the flesh"—nickname we should rather call it—often applied by preachers of the Gospel to learned and scientific men at the present day. But, if it is applied to them, an injustice is done where the difference between them and their namesakes of antiquity is not admitted to be great. The difference is great; I shall try to explain to you what the difference is, in a way suited to an occasion of this kind.

The methods of modern research are modern; the rules and principles according to which learned and scientific men of modern times conduct their inquries are of modern date; they are themselves modern discoveries. Our "wise men after the flesh"—let us speak of them by their ecclesiastical nickname—are men who try to discover the facts of nature, and human life, and human history; and, having done so, form comparisons of them, and theories respecting them; they find facts first, and then the theory or law of the facts which they have found; they adapt theory to fact; not fact

to theory. But just exactly the reverse, to use popular language, was the common way of the wise men here spoken of. These ancient smatterers, sophists, disciples of more ancient masters, had theories to which they adapted facts —large and cumbrous theories as to the constitution of the world, the number and nature of the elements, the origin of matter and mind, good and evil, life and death. You can easily see what difference this would make between our wise men and these ancient wise men as to the reception of the Gospel. Our modern scholars and thinkers, any of them worth the name, are seekers after truth, to whom truth is end and aim; and if Christianity is true, they are as likely to discover the truth of it as other people; more likely, one would say, than people who are neither scholars nor thinkers. These ancient wise men, on the other hand, stood rather in the position of our ignorant and superstitious masses, who take a side in politics and religion without candid inquiry, and without capacity for candid inquiry, and are resolute to defend their side just because it is theirs.

We have still further to remember that this difference between our wise men and these ancient wise men involved another distinction, no less important. Our literary and scientific men, no doubt, for certain purposes and at certain moments, act together in bodies, and there are sects and parties among them almost as if they were

all professing Christians; but for all that, as far as they are faithful to their vocation, as far as they are true to the spirit of modern research and modern culture, they are inquirers who inquire each man for himself and by himself, and owe no allegiance to a party, or a sect, or a school, or a master, but to truth alone. It was different, of course, with these ancient wise men. According to the various theories concerning all things in heaven and earth which they adopted, they belonged to one or other of a few philosophical schools or parties into which the learned world was divided. As leaders or adherents of their school or party, they enjoyed what credit and influence they had; they were attached, by their attachment to it, and independently of all personal considerations, to old opinions, and they were jealous of new opinions, as possibly or certainly inimical to its authority and its repute. Consider only how a college of physicians, or an incorporation of lawyers, or a convocation of clergy, might be expected nowadays to welcome any startling novelty affecting their profession. That will show you how these ancient wise men, in consequence of their connection with a school or party, were disposed to welcome Christianity. On account of this connection, if for no other reason, they naturally viewed with distrust or aversion that preaching of the cross which, though not pretending to be a rival wisdom to their own, evidently meant that their wisdom was foolishness with God.

In contrast to them, as I have said, our wise men act independently of each other. If there is any tie among them, it is that of a common reverence for the unprejudiced and untrammelled pursuit of truth. It is ridiculous and unmeaning to speak of them in reference to Christianity or anything else, as belonging to a sect of mathematicians, or a school of physicists, or a clique of philologists. And, therefore, if Christianity is true, they are not as a class in any way, more than other people, disabled from discovering its truth.

It is easy, then, to see how the "wise men after the flesh," at the time my text was written, should have had to be counted among the classes that were least disposed, or most reluctant, to embrace the Gospel—it is easy, that is to say, as far as they are concerned, to interpret my text, if you take it as historical, not doctrinal.

Turn now for a moment to the other classes here mentioned—the mighty and the noble. When Christianity was new, as it was when my text was written, it had all the advantages, and all the disadvantages, of novelty; for one thing, it least attracted, or rather it most repelled, those who had least to gain and most to lose by any change. These, of course, were the privileged classes of society—those here mentioned.

Remember, too, that those changes which Christianity threatened, were the most violent, and therefore the most distasteful possible—I mean to these classes. They were free, and a

great part of the community were their slaves, of whose property and life they could dispose almost at their pleasure. It is now a maxim, the truth of which, thanks to Christianity, no one dreams of disputing, that property has its duties as well as its rights. But that maxim had no currency, if it had any existence, then. Property and power and rank had rights, which were so many exemptions from duties. No wonder if a religion which came to protest that the duties of the great and noble are still more numerous than their privileges, was at first distasteful to these classes.

Then, to make what was distasteful in itself doubly so by reason of the manner of it, it was not some great philosopher, or legislator, or magnate of their own lofty order, or even of their own race, who told those that were the lords of many to become the servants of all; it was a company of artisans, fishermen, slaves, foreigners, the very scum of the earth. It would have been not wonderful but miraculous if, under the circumstances, a ready and favourable hearing had been got for Christianity among the mighty and the noble.

Especially is this obvious if you consider that the Gospel was gospel in those days. It was not then what it has often been since, a theological jargon, but a plain, straightforward declaration of the truth that God is love, and man's true life is love, that to be selfish is to be damned, to love is to be saved.

Fancy the effect even now upon our privileged classes of a small company of penniless artisans, foreign tramps, communists, starting up with some new religious notions, and even, while disclaiming all worldly purposes, really, in their doctrine, prognosticating and promoting a social and political revolution.

The Gospel has no longer the disadvantages, any more than the advantages of novelty. When sons of nobles are ill-paid clergymen, and sovereigns and statesmen are gratuitous defenders of the faith, there is nothing to hinder the great and noble, any more than the poor and lowly, from professing Christianity. And, as regards the practice of Christianity, the case is not different. The mighty and the noble, as a matter of course, now accept, along with their honours and their privileges, a host of duties, public and social, duties to the poor, to dependents, to the community, to the sovereign, which are enjoined rather by public opinion than by law. So much are things changed, property now has not only duties as well as rights, but has fewer rights than duties, and any man of large property and high rank, who even fairly and decently does the duties of his station, is one of the busiest, and is not one of the least useful men in the land. Accordingly, and to prove all this, while it is true that once there were few of the wise and the mighty and the noble who professed the religion of Christ, now, as I have said, there are at least as

many of these classes as of any other (if there are not more), who exhibit the true spirit of Christianity in lives of faith towards God and charity towards men.

With respect, then, to the mighty and the noble, just as with regard to the wise men after the flesh, we have but to refer to the time at which my text was written, not only to see that it might possibly be true, but to discover why it was true. Take it as doctrinal, it is a mistake; take it as historical, it is a statement of what might easily have been predicted as inevitable.

Some apology, indeed, seems required for arguing at so much length, and with so much gravity and circumstance, a point about which there can be no difficulty for any intelligent mind. If an apology is needed, then, it is to be found first of all in the fact that there is perhaps no passage of Scripture which is more often misquoted, or misquoted to worse purpose, than the one before us. Ignorant or unthinking people have no difficulty about adopting opinions and beliefs, few or many, in regard to the abstrusest and most mysterious subjects, if only these opinions and beliefs are accredited to them by any kind of authority, if they are only common or orthodox. On the other hand, minds accustomed to accurate research and exact thought, are less ready to subscribe to every doctrine which is propounded for their acceptance. Many things which are perfectly simple to the many who make no effort to understand

them, are exceedingly perplexing to the few who are not content without knowing something of what they mean. This is the reason, no doubt, why our literary and scientific men as a class, while not to be supposed estranged in any way from the spirit of the Christian faith, are often enough known to be indifferent or opposed to popular forms of Christianity, or popular beliefs and modes of thought which take to themselves emphatically or exclusively the title of Christian.

But of this no account whatever is made in much which is said and written for the edification of the Christian world. If it is not explicitly made a reproach to scholars and thinkers that they are not brainless and illiterate, at any rate no allowance is made for their having difficulties to encounter of which the multitude who are not thinkers know nothing. They are reproved in one quarter, ridiculed in another, pitied in another, as if no account could be given of them except that they choose to be offended by the simplicity of the Gospel, and as if it could not be retorted on their behalf that simplicity is exactly what they look for and cannot find in those elaborate systems of doctrine to which the name of the Gospel is too often given. And then, to give effect to censure, for which the best ground that can be assigned is a blunder, a text is quoted in a sense in which it was never meant. Paul, who was himself a scholar and an Apostle, is made to say

here that scarcely can any one be a scholar and a Christian.

How much harm is done to the cause of Christianity by thus associating it, or identifying it, with opposition to the best thought of the best minds of our time—for such science may claim to be—is a point which I cannot here discuss. One thing hardly needs to be said, viz., that to identify or associate it with any sort of antagonism to science is necessarily, however unwittingly, to associate or identify it with vulgar ignorance, imbecility of mind, cant, credulity—with the effect, of course, of weakening its hold upon all but the most unintelligent and unthinking. Hence, for one man who is shaken in his belief of this or that religious doctrine by arguments advanced by men of science, a hundred might perhaps be counted who owe a suspicion of all religious teaching, or a contempt for it, to apologists for Christianity, who undertake to defend it against science, and succeed only in showing with what bad arguments a good cause may come to be supported.

It is more important to remark, however, that when Christianity is opposed in any sort of way to science, it is made to reject the help of its best friend against its worst enemy. We have to thank modern science, it is admitted, for dissipating for us a mass of gloomy and noxious superstitions with which ages of ignorance and credulity had overlaid the essential verities of our Christian faith. That these essential verities, very few and

very simple, may be dissociated from superstitions still existing, and distinguished from ecclesiastical shibboleths which are nothing if not superstitions in the making, much remains to be done which modern science seems required to do for us. Ignorance, not science, is the arch-enemy of the simplicity of the Gospel, the purity of the faith, or whatever you choose to call the spirit as distinguished from the letter of the Christian revelation. Our controversy, on this score, is not with the few who have learned from science to believe little, but with the many who, from ignorance, doubt nothing. Whatever may be the case, then, with regard to ecclesiastical and doctrinal systems, calling themselves Christian, it is at the expense of the purity, and therefore at the expense of the life and power of the Christian faith, that science is in any way opposed or depreciated in the name of Christianity. No greater gain to "pure religion and undefiled" could be wished, than what it would be for Christian churches to take friendly account of science as having much to say in favour of the simplification of their creeds. No greater loss, perhaps, could be incurred by Christian churches, than what they do incur by maintaining, as against an arch-enemy in science, and with fresh ardour and incensed dignity, ancient doctrines and traditions which, whether true or false, are at any rate at once antiquated and trivial.

Passing from this point, however, though it is one on which much might be said, I observe

further, by way of excuse for drawing your attention to the distinction which is here to be noted between what is historical and what is doctrinal, that it is a distinction which applies to many passages of Scripture besides this. For example, there is a hard saying of our Lord, which we all know, and which has been the occasion of anxiety to some sensitive souls—a saying with regard to the rich—"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." All sorts of explanations are given of this saying, to soften it a little for the man who has the misfortune to be what we are all, or almost all, striving to become. The camel has been turned into something else than the animal of that name, and the needle's eye has been converted, I believe, into a gateway or a door. I see no need for these explanations. The saying, no doubt, is true in a sense, with reference to all time; to a certain extent it is doctrinally true. But take it historically, and though a figure of speech, it is almost, if not altogether, true to the very letter. How hard, or rather impossible for a rich man, rich and honoured, surrounded by love, obedience, troops of friends, to cast in his lot with Christian society in the days of its early poverty and ignominy, to renounce the flattery of orthodox divines, and the respect and admiration of the orthodox community, and accept the reproach of heresy and fanaticism along with fishermen and

publicans and sinners. It is not easy for a rich man now to enter into the kingdom of God, but it is because it is not easy for any man to depart from evil and do good. Now, when Christianity is the religion of a large portion of the human race, and of all the leading nations of the earth and their leaders, it is no more difficult for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for any smaller body—it is no harder for rich men than for poor men to enter the kingdom of heaven. Each class have their own special difficulties; it is impossible to say on which side the difficulties are least or greatest.

I allude to this point, however, without laying any stress upon it. For, after all, the best apology for marking, as I have done, the distinction between what is historical and what is doctrinal, in reference to my text, is not that that distinction applies to other passages as well as to this, but that there are few passages or none to which it is so important to apply it. I remark, then, finally, in illustration of this, that what seems here to concern only the faith of the few, really touches the faith of the many.

It is true that the wise and the mighty and the noble and the rich are the few—so small a minority of the human race now and always that it might seem to be a matter of comparatively small moment, except to themselves, how they stand related to the Gospel, or how the Gospel stands related to them. But the real truth is, what concerns the few is the

concern of the many, for if there is any class of mankind to whom Christian faith in God is, in the very nature of things, difficult or impossible, the faith of all the rest must obviously be the poorer and the weaker. So vast is the whole number of the human race, it would seem, in one point of view, to matter little that one individual should finally perish; but, then, if we had to regard the loss of even one individual as premeditated by God, or not regretted by Him, this would make the whole human race losers to a degree impossible to estimate, for it would circumscribe God, it would put bounds to that eternal mercy and kindness which ought to be to our minds as infinite as eternal. And much more, if we think of whole classes of mankind as somehow placed in a difficult or hopeless position as regards salvation, we limit God and impoverish faith. It matters not that these classes are comparatively small, the supposition that faith and hope have been made difficult or impossible for them, beggars the faith and hope of all the human race, by assigning to faith and hope as their proper object a diminished God.

It is as the Father of all His creatures, kind even to the evil and unthankful, infinite in His tenderness and pity for all, yearning over all with boundless love; it is thus that God is revealed to us in Christ, and that He is felt by the Christian mind to be God indeed. Tell us of anything that goes to show that there are some of the human race for

whom God does not intend His grace, or to whom He does not extend it, with regard to whom He is not sorry if they are offered it and reject it; it matters not, of course, that we are not directly concerned, it signifies nothing that He is still a Father to us and ours, He is not that Father of all, rich in mercy to all men, in whom alone it is any satisfaction or any comfort to believe and hope.

Consider the relation of parents and children. If a father loves all his children with an equal, because an unbounded affection, each of them is the happier that every other shares that affection, because in this way his reverence for his father's character, his admiration of his father's goodness, is raised to its utmost pitch. But suppose you have a father who loves some of his children, and is indifferent or unfeeling to the rest, it is not only those not loved by him who suffer, or even possibly suffer most—those whom he does love, to whom he is the kindest and most doting of parents, cannot love him and esteem him as they would do if his love were impartial, and because they cannot do this their comfort and their enjoyment as his children are curtailed and lessened. It is not the same thing to be loved by one who is worthy of our love, whose character draws forth our affection, and to be loved by one whose character imperfectly attracts us, or sometimes repels or shocks us.

Apply this to the Father of all. It is one thing to be loved by Him if He is really a Father to all His children, boundless in His goodness and mercy,

and another thing to love Him, and be loved by Him, if only some of His children are objects of His care. If to love God at all is good, to love a good God must be best. It is best to love God, not as the God of the Jews only, but as equally the God and Father of the Samaritans and of the heathen; it is much better to love Him as the God of all denominations, than as the God of the Establishment, or as the God of the Dissenters; it is better to love Him as the Father alike of sinners and of saints, than as the God of any peculiar or chosen people.

It is worth while, for this reason, if for no other, to show that my text is not doctrine but history; true with reference to one time, not everywhere and always true. As doctrine, in which sense it is commonly taken, it is one of those misinterpreted texts which confute not other texts, but the Gospel itself, for if there is a Gospel, it is the eternal and boundless love of God, the Father of all.

That this is the Gospel, I for one have no doubt. If you ask me how many are called or not called, how many chosen or not chosen, I answer—tell me, is God the Father of all men, or is He not? Did Christ say anything on the subject, and what did He say? I answer so because, if God is our Father, it is simply absurd to suppose He should not wish and choose and plan and promote the well-being, the eternal well-being of all. Imagine a father who does not care how many or how few of his children live or die, suffer or rejoice, hunger or have enough

to eat. You don't ask, surely, whether he is a good or a bad father; you say he is not a father at all.

You empty the Gospel of its meaning, you turn the Christian revelation into a puzzle, if you say, then, that there is a single human being towards whom God is not what a Father should be. This one word Father in the Gospel is the gospel, and it tells you how many are called, because it tells you how many are cast out.

In Christ Jesus—that is to say, in reference to the fatherly love of God—there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither rich nor poor, neither high nor low, except that while death is uniform, life is various. Our different outward conditions in this mortal life are not divisions made between those who are, and those who are not beloved; they are a diversity of gifts, the object of which is to produce diversity of grace. The wise and the mighty and the noble with a wider experience of the world than others, discover in their own peculiar way, often more surely and more miserably than others, that every man at his best estate, if his best estate be worldly, is wholly vanity. They, therefore, may hear, and do often hear, the call of the Gospel, which is a call to higher and nobler and more blessed life—hear it with thankfulness. When they do thus hear it, theirs is the opportunity on a great scale, with large means, with signal results, to work the work of God, and share His life: able to make many rich by their influence and beneficence—to them, in spite of their

riches, belongs in a special degree the blessedness of the poor in spirit.

So, on the other hand, the poor and obscure and illiterate find life empty from the first. To them it is no illusion, because there is in it so much of the haggard reality of wretchedness. How good and blessed for them, therefore, to discover that the Highest of all is their Father and Friend, and by the help of that faith to make for themselves, out of a seeming predestination to misery, an opportunity for that patient continuance in well-doing, the gains of which are countless and eternal.

The unlearned think with envy of the lettered and gifted; the poor and obscure with jealousy of the rich and great. It is pardonable, but it is weak. I know that it is nonsense to condemn the ambition of the poor and lowly to be great and mighty, and that it is worse than nonsense to censure the ambition of the ignorant to be learned and accomplished. It is ridiculous to talk as if birth and property and learning were not advantages worth having. But while it is folly, and mischievous folly too, to talk as if these things and the like of them were not legitimate objects of ambition, what we are bound as Christians not to forget is, that God is kind who has denied to most of us the possession of these things—kind because He allows us to entertain a still higher ambition than that of gaining them. I will tell you what was the loftiest ambition which this world has seen in any one—it was that with which Jesus Christ was

inspired when for our sakes He became poor. We cannot all be of the number of the learned and the noble and the mighty, but we can all be of an order which is higher still—the order to which He belonged. The Society of Jesus—if there were really a society answering in its character to the name—might give stars and ribbons to decorate the breasts of kings and princes. We cannot be nobles and great men, but we can be what nobles and great men were originally understood to be, and what they may still as their highest ambition seek to become—heroes and saints. We all know and feel that a hero is grander than a monarch, a saint higher than a noble. As we look back upon the history of mankind, it is not the miscellaneous throng of the mighty and the great, who lived in big houses and wore stars and ribbons, that we envy; it is here and there the truly great and noble man, hero and saint, king and priest unto God, who lived and laboured for his kind. We envy him, we know that his life was true and blessed life. And we all, even we who are born and will remain among the poor and lowly, may rise to such greatness. In Jesus Christ we are called to be heroes and saints, to fight the good fight of faith against sense and against common example, to live the life of the Son of Man, who was poor and made many rich, to do good and fear no evil, to make the world better and more gladsome by our presence in it, and to fill a place in the hearts and memories, not only of our family and our friends, but of those

who work and pray that the Kingdom of God may come, and all men become kings and priests unto God. Ye see your calling—the wise and the mighty and the noble are called, and along with them the poor and lowly, called to one and the same nobility of character and life.

X.

CHRISTIANITY AND RITUAL.

(*Reprinted from "Good Words."*)

THE author of "The Divine Legation of Moses" —that magnificent paradox in five volumes—has founded an argument for the truth of the Mosaic religion on the fact that the writings of the great lawgiver contain no mention of immortality; in other words, he tries to prove that that religion is divine, because it is without what is so large a part of other religions—the idea of a future state. An argument of a similar kind (only conclusive instead of fallacious and absurd) in favour of the truth of the Christian religion may be drawn from the fact that it is a religion without a ritual—that it not only prescribes no ritual, such as other religions sanction, but that in spirit, if not in so many words, it proscribes such ritual. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Be the reasons what they may, religion as distinguished from morality is at present discredited with many—has fallen in a time of light upon days of darkness, days of evil tongues, or at any rate of evil thoughts. In the view and intention of many, its fate is to be abolished by its name being given to another thing, by its being merged altogether in morality. The advocates of this view would contend that all that is important and all that is real in any religious system, is the amount and quality of the morality which it serves to inculcate and enforce. Faith is nothing, conduct is everything. To the support of this doctrine the language of the Apostle James, which we have quoted, and much more in his Epistle, appears to lend its countenance, and accordingly James is a popular preacher, and his texts are proverbs, and the Gospel according to James is a fifth Gospel. But in point of fact the Apostle lends no authority to a view of religion which annihilates it. There is, as every reader of Greek knows, something about morality in the verse in question, but nothing at all about religion. It is a wrong, or at any rate an ambiguous and misleading word which is used in our translation. The word which is translated religion ought to have been rendered worshipping, or ritual, or something of that kind, just as in another place in which it occurs—"a voluntary humility and *worshipping* of angels." It would be quite as correct there to say "religion of angels" as it is to say in the

Epistle of James, "pure religion and undefiled." The "practical" view of religion, as far as it proposes, on the authority of this Apostle, to abolish religion, to merge it in morality, is confuted, not by common sense or Scripture only, but by a slight knowledge of Greek. What St. James means to say, of course, is that true worship, true ritual, true church service, is not rite and ceremony, not costly and elaborate worshipping on high days and holidays in decorated temples and incensed churches—it is charity and a blameless life. His proposition is that morality is the ritual of the Christian religion; a beautiful life the finest and grandest liturgy.

It has been well said by Coleridge that morality was the spirit of which the outward service of ancient religion was the letter. The rites and ceremonies and ceremonial vestments of the Mosaic law were a picture-book by which a rude nation was taught some simple elementary moral lessons. But morality itself, even according to the fifth gospel, is the service and ceremonial of the Christian religion. There is endless controversy at the present day as to ritual, as to the forms of worship and the ecclesiastical usages and arrangements which are sanctioned by divine authority. On this point writings of buried ages, volumes of forgotten lore, are disinterred and ransacked, not with antiquarian curiosity, but with religious zeal, in order to find the smallest particle of information. When anything of the

kind is found, when some ancient author, whose oblivion ought to have remained undisturbed till the day of doom, is discovered to have a word to say about this rite, or that ecclesiastical custom, what delight, what jubilation! Go back, however, still farther into the past than the most enthusiastic ritualist of them all. Instead of asking what says this father of the third century and that saint of the sixth, ask what say the apostles, what say the evangelists, what say the men who founded Christianity? and you will find they have nothing to say about rites or ceremonies or customs (the two great sacraments excepted); not a word, unless it be that they are all superfluous. Why? It is not that in the planting of Christianity the thing somehow was forgotten—that the question was overlooked whether the new religion should have a ritual like the Mosaic. It is not that our Lord and the apostles and evangelists did not think of observance and ritual until it was too late, and that this father and that saint, wiser in their generation, rose up at a later time to remedy the defect. Neither (though this is very often said) was it because it was thought that the Church might be safely left to invent a ritual for itself, to adopt what rites and ceremonies might be found suitable in different ages and different places. Far from it. There is much which is only half told in the New Testament—much, at any rate, with regard to which doubt and uncertainty is possible or inevitable. But

on this point there is less room for doubt and uncertainty than on almost any other. Christianity not only prescribes no ritual. Implicitly, and for reasons which concern the most vital interests of the faith and of the world, Christianity proscribes ritual: it will admit of none—none but that ritual which is also religion, religion expressed in act, the dedication of the worshipper himself as a reasonable sacrifice, holy and acceptable, unto God. Ancient religion, with its ritual, ended for the most part in the improvement of the individual soul—in teaching this man and that to be purer and holier. The new religion begins where the ancient ended, with pure and loving hearts, and as its ritual, by means of these, it goes forth to purify and bless the world — to convert, not a nation or a church, but the whole earth into God's heritage and praise and glory.

If this be so, to say the least of it, ritualism is an anachronism. There is a mistake in it of not less than twenty centuries. We do not mean, of course, by ritualism any improvement of Church services, such as is desired and advocated in all churches by many, who are just as willing to make these services simpler than they are as to make them more complex, provided only they can make them more real and more beautiful. To have good prayers and good music instead of bad, to worship God in a beautiful instead of an ugly building, is not ritualism; at any rate, it is very harmless ritualism. That which is

properly so called, for one thing, if it loves effect, abhors or disdains simplicity. To exhibit Christianity outwardly in the smoke of incense, in the sweet cadences of music, in the rich vestments of priests and celebrants, in the pomp of sacraments, in the substitution of wax candles for daylight; to fill the calendar with saints' days; to make the masses who can hardly read the Gospels pedants and enthusiasts in the history of clerical robes and church furniture; to blazon all modern life with antique, obscure, or unintelligible ecclesiastical heraldry — this ritualism, properly so called, is the ambition and delight of many good men, and some clever and highly cultivated men, at the present day (very able and very willing to do battle for themselves); and as we see from its association with ascetic and monastic views and tendencies in the minds of its most conspicuous advocates, it has for its immediate, if not its chief, effect, to fill the mind with holy languors, sentimental ecstasies, heavenly raptures. This is Christianity addressed to the senses, just as Judaism was addressed to the senses, and with this difference, that the old picture-book, once so instructive, but now gone out of date, edited for the use, not of children, but men, no longer answers its purpose, no longer teaches with distinctness anything in particular; but where it has any effect, has it above all in those unprofitable raptures (unprofitable to the world) in which monastic minds and monastic institutions have

allowed the vital energy of Christianity to escape like waste steam from a stationary locomotive into the barren fields of infinite space. How different from this the Apostle James's idea! Christianity exhibiting itself outwardly, indeed, but not in smoke of incense, not in procession of hired singers, but in brave men and pure women, instinct with the life divine of love going about in an evil world to reform and regenerate it—going about, and while bravely, nobly, piously meeting temptation and resisting it for themselves, entering into the abodes of the destitute and forlorn, the widows and the fatherless, the fallen and the outcast, and illuminating these cheerless places with the light which human love alone brings down from heaven. It seems folly to argue which of these is the true idea of Christian ritual.

That renouncing all other ritual Christianity claims for itself this sublime one of a perfect morality, that it will have no authorized and universal liturgy but that of beautiful and saintly lives beautifying and sanctifying the world—this is one of the most conclusive evidences which it is possible to allege in favour of the truth of Christianity. Beginning thus where the ancient religion ended, Christianity identifies God's glory and man's blessedness; eternal well-being possible to the creature, and supreme glory due to the Creator, and by this one thing, this supreme generalization in a loftier field than that of science

makes good its title to be considered the one true everlasting faith. It is man's true life and blessedness to love and do good; it is God's glory to receive this from man as the homage of the creature to the Creator, or rather of the son to the Father of all. In this way Christianity identifies true worship with true blessedness, the ritual of religion with the true life of man. The object of revelation, of all that manifestation of God which we have in the Bible, in our hearts, in the world—it is according to Christianity, not that One, who is Lord of all, may obtain a selfish glory for Himself at the expense of His creatures, command tribute, in the spirit of a tyrant, from a wider empire than Cæsar's, but that we who are invited to love Him and serve Him may be blessed, and all men with us, in that love and service, enjoy it in our true life and well-being. Man's true life and blessedness consist in his being what he was intended by God to be, in his living that highest life for which he was created and endowed; in a word, in the offering of himself as a sacrifice to God, above all, in deeds of faith and charity. Love is the fulfilling of the law. It is at the same time the fulfilling of the existence of the creature. Christianity, therefore, has no ritual, no ceremonial except that of love; refuses, not alone on the ground of God's claims as supreme, but on the ground of man's well-being as man, to recognize observance, or rite, or oblation, except that of a saintly

or priestly life. Not enough according to the one heaven-born religion for heaven to get its due, not enough for God to be honoured in costly rites, or for man to be taught by these obedience to divine law. To love, to be kind even to the unthankful; to be not only just and true, but to be kind and generous and loving; to give and strive and suffer for others—this was, and is, the life and blessedness of God in Christ upon the earth, and by this the world lying in wickedness is reclaimed from darkness and despair, is purified, enlightened, blessed; by this all things are restored to divine beauty and order; another paradise, fairer than that which lends its beauty and fragrance to the primitive records of our race, is formed out of the moral wilderness. Therefore, and not because God is a hard taskmaster, and must have honour and tribute, the only ritual of the Christian faith is love, to visit the fatherless and widows, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. God accepts nothing less than this, disdains and rejects anything less than this, because, even if He could forego what is His own, He who is love cannot suffer His creatures to miss or come short of their true life and blessedness. For this reason nothing is worship of God which is not the well-being of man. Ritual is not only not prescribed; it is prohibited.

There may be errors in particular views of Christianity, grave untruth in some historical and some current representations of it; but beyond

all doubt that religion is divine and everlasting, never to be displaced or superseded, or essentially modified, while the world endures, which thus claims for itself, as its outward vesture and expression, not sacrifices such as a selfish being might tyrannically exact and other selfish beings slavishly accord, but the restoration to true and therefore blessed life of a race of beings who have sinned and suffered. To make that the end of his service and his worship is worthy in the highest degree conceivable by a human soul of a Being worthy of eternal worship and glory. To seek thus to be worshipped, not with men's hands, but with the perfection and fulfilment of their existence and destiny, is in this supreme degree worthy of the King eternal, immortal, invisible. If there is anything divine Christianity is so, because, as a religion, it prescribes as ritual no ritual, no empty forms which offer to God a barren honour, or which inculcate a partial view of human duty, but Love which is the blessedness of the worshipper, the salt of the earth, the glory of the Eternal.

All this implies, of course, that religion, in the Christian sense, is real, and not outward, but inward. Morality is a costume, but there is a living form beneath the drapery. To have no creed is at the present day one of the most popular of creeds. All history, however, goes to prove that, without religion, morality—and above all, the highest morality—is a plant without roots, a building without a foundation.

There is one city of the East of biblical and historical renown, which is surrounded on all sides by deserts; but which, to the astonishment of the traveller who has been toiling for days over burning sands to reach its gates, presents to the eye, as he enters, a wonderful succession of gardens gay with the richest verdure and the most gorgeous blooms. Above that city—the most ancient, perhaps, in the world—above that desert-girdled city, Damascus — towers the lofty Lebanon, with its snow-clad head piercing the fleecy clouds of a summer sky. It is in its lofty summits that the secret of this wonderful verdure lies. There, in those snows that mingle with the clouds, are the inexhaustible fountains of the innumerable rills of water by which, in Damascus, the desert has been turned into a garden, and the wilderness made to blossom as the rose. All history proves that it is only from the fountain of a religion which, like Lebanon, lifts its head above the ground, and represents the aspirations of the soul after the unseen and eternal, that the sustenance which is needed for the purest and heavenliest virtues of humanity, the truest and noblest morality, can ever flow.

But on this point it is not necessary to enlarge. On this historical ground it is superfluous to confute that renunciation of all religious ideas and beliefs which is common at the present day. Instead of saying that religion ought not to be abolished because it encourages morality, or is

essential to its existence, we may say, and we ought to say, that religion cannot be abolished if we would.

God has secured the existence of religion by giving it a place in the being of man; and if any young man thinks that he can abolish religion by sneering at it in his mother or his sister he argues his own ignorance. Religion has its eternal foundation in the very nature and constitution of the mind of man. It is not a more natural and instinctive act of his bodily nature to turn the eye to the light, than it is of his spiritual nature to ask, Is there a God?—to look beyond the visible to the invisible; to rise from the disappointment connected with sensual gratification to the yearning for something higher and better, to the sense of religious duties and the experience of religious emotions. This is what finally settles the question as to religion and morality—whether we shall have one or both, and if only one, which of the two. Be it for good or for evil, we cannot get rid of religion, except in one way, viz., not by abolishing God or proving scientifically that His existence is doubtful, but by abolishing man himself. It is easy for the fool, especially the learned and scientific fool, to prove that there is no God. But like a murmuring sea, which heeds not the scream of wandering birds, the soul of humanity murmurs of God, and confutes the erudite folly of the fool by disregarding it.

That which above all distinguishes and charac-

terizes man as man is this high capacity to look beyond and above what is seen to what is unseen; to observe and feel the unchangeableness which underlies and supports this changeful world; to understand and appreciate the grand distinction—grander still than that between light and dark, night and day—viz., that the things which are seen are temporal, while the things which are unseen are eternal; to live by faith and not by sight; to feel that a man's life, unlike that of an ox, consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but in himself, in the riches of the heart, his faith towards God, his love towards men. It ought to be the object of all our ecclesiastical, and, indeed, of all our social and political arrangements, to develop this capacity, or to facilitate its development and exercise. But, at any rate, it cannot be abolished except by abolishing humanity. Those who appear to think that Acts of Parliament may be passed, the effect of which would be to eradicate it, are as much alarmists as if they dreaded lest the smoke of a bonfire should extinguish the stars.

As for the outward vesture and ritual of this religion, noble and beautiful as it is, it may be of little worth except as ritual and vesture. A man's life may be blameless and beneficent, not to say decent and respectable, and yet the man himself be neither loving nor pure, neither good nor noble. It is what the man is which is important to God and to himself. To God, either

as Creator or as the Supremely Good, the one thing of importance must be, not what acts a man does—what small part he plays on a fleeting stage —but of what sort, of what character he is, whether that which is the real man be alive or dead, full of light or full of darkness; generous and pure and sympathetic and reverent, or selfish and sordid and worldly. Morality or immorality is all-important between man and man. Religion or no religion is important to God; it is equally important to man. We may well live moral lives, and yet find that life has not much to give—that for the honest and temperate, as for the vicious and profligate, life is vanity, and experience prolonged vexation. Give the soul its own, as you give the body and the intellect; lift your thoughts to the unchanging Goodness and Truth beyond this changeful world, which orders all its events and changes; think of One who needs not to be worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; think of Him requiring to be loved and worshipped, not because He is great and mighty, but because He is good, and because to love Him is blessedness, and to worship Him is heaven; think of all duty, even the commonest, as to be done to Him, all work to be performed in His service, all our fellow-men to be loved and cared for for His sake; think thus of Him and of your own life; thus take a religious view of all things, and be actuated by a religious spirit, and you will not escape sorrow or

loss, you will rather have special crosses and losses to carry and to endure; but you will also know that man was made not to record a verdict against his Maker of having been made in vain, but to show forth the glory and praise of Him who made him, by sharing with Him his own life of immortal joy and unending blessedness. This is the teaching of the true religion; and it is an evidence of its truth that its ritual thus, like itself, is love; that in it all things are reconciled to God; and God, in His greatness and blessedness, in His life of eternal love, is all in all.

Christianity is divine, we have said, because it makes the true worship of the Creator the perfect and blessed life of the creature. Christianity renders this life of the creature possible by the revelation which it makes of the Creator. Before God and the Father it is true worship to live a Christian life—a pure and self-sacrificing life like that of Christ. There is an idea of God which all religions grope after, sometimes catch a glimpse of, and then again (with the exception of Christianity) allow to escape from their horizon. It is the idea which finds sole and perfect expression in Christianity, the conception of the Eternal and Almighty, of whom our understandings teach us something, as that infinite goodness after which our hearts crave. This revelation of Himself by God in Christ renders possible, not indeed a new religion—for there never was any religion but one—but it renders possible a new ritual, that new life of faith and love, that per-

fect life on the part of men, peace on earth, good-will everywhere, which is the ascription of Glory to God in the highest. It is in the nature of man to be kindled and excited to love by love alone. In the Gospel, which is the revelation of the Father-hood of God, there is a revelation of the infinite love which sheds light over all life, and over death, this world and the next, man and God, duty and pleasure, joy and sorrow, suffering and sin; a revelation which makes the universe and man himself a witness to one truth, to one eternal fact—God is Love. By this revelation, not of a new, but of an old, an eternal fact, new life is stirred in human souls. Poor weak mortals laden with sins, and superstitiously oppressed with fears are able to say and think, "We do love to think of that perfectly holy and pure and good Being, our Father in Heaven—not as we ought, indeed, and feebly and little, but still we love Him. And love is the fulfilling of the law. Our duty to our fellow-men is not only sacred, but easy to discharge, if we all are brethren, and Christ the Brother of all, and God the Father of all. Before God the Father it is pure worship, and it is possible, as it is true worship, 'to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.'" Thus Christianity, which as religion prescribes love as ritual, makes that ritual possible.

Christianity is a religion, and it is a ritual. As a religion, it is love; as a ritual, it is the same. According to the religion, God is love; according

to the ritual, man's life is love. He who receives worship is worshipped as love. The worship which is paid by the worshipper is love. And herein the worshipper and the worshipped are both blessed, and made one eternally in blessedness, the Father in His children, the children in their Father; and so there shall be fulfilled at length the hope of all who love God, and all who love man, when God Himself in Christ shall be all in all.

Half the disputes that have arisen in the Christian Church, that have torn it asunder and rendered its hopes abortive, have been disputes about words. More than half of those, perhaps, in which things have been concerned have been disputes about forms of worship, church services, postures, standing or kneeling at prayer, the elevation of the host, hymn-books, organs, about pure worship and impure, innovations in ritual and breaches of ecclesiastical custom. True worship, according to Christianity, has little or nothing to do with these things. It consists in that very charity which is almost always absent on both sides in disputes about them.

Torn asunder by quarrels, which are mostly quarrels about worship, the Church of Christ has for ages presented a strange, and, it must be said, a melancholy spectacle—the spectacle of an institution which, intended by divine wisdom to further the highest of all ends, has been not merely diverted from the sole pursuit of that end, but has almost forgotten it in the pursuit of ends inferior, and, in-

deed, opposite. As means of grace, as means for cultivating the religious spirit as well as for giving expression to religious feeling, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance or the necessity of Church forms, public prayer and praise, sacraments and preaching. Questions arise with regard to these things, therefore, which are questions of moment, and which ought to be seriously examined and discussed. But when these things are all settled and arranged, the work of Christianity, the work of the Church is not done; it has yet to be begun. Pure worship is not this or that form of service—Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian—but it is that charity which in disputes between sects is generally conspicuous by its absence. The object of Christianity and of the Church, as we have been defining it, is to consummate the glory of God by consummating the life of man. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is the mandate of the Christian faith. "Till we all come unto a perfect man," is the charter of the Christian Church. Its worship is pure, not when its members have clean hands and a pure heart, but when its great aim is to perfect the life of man in every corner of the earth. The Sermon on the Mount is a sermon on perfection; its text, if it had had a text, would have been, "Be ye perfect." We see from it in what direction perfection lies, and so in what direction lies the work of the Christian Church. Perfection has been often painted, often symbolized as an angel, fair and spotless, with smooth brow

and glistering garments, an angel with wings pointed for flight up through the clear blue sky, away from this world of misery and sin. Not such is the image of perfection which rises before the mind as we read the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather it is a homely, honest, horny-handed workman returning in the evening through the fields or along the streets of the crowded town; returning wearied, "smutched," but yet unweakened, a better man for his day's work, his muscles made strong, his whole frame braced and developed by his honest and useful toil. This is the idea of perfection which the Sermon on the Mount gives us. It is not after Christ has forbidden at once the unclean act and the impure thought, but after He has taught us that God is kind even to the evil and unthankful, and enjoined us to follow His example and to love our enemies, that the Great Preacher introduces the precept, which is all religious precepts in one, "Be ye perfect." It is in this direction, doing good, not absence of evil, that Christian perfection, man's true life and blessedness, lies.

It is the perfection which the Sermon on the Mount thus defines, perfection consisting not in the absence of sin, but in being and doing good, which it is the object of the Christian religion to enable mankind to attain. It is a religion, therefore, which identifies religion and ritual. It makes perfection its aim; it makes perfection consist in being and doing good; and therefore its ritual, its only ritual, is charity.

This furnishes a basis for the union of Christendom which, as endeavours to establish a universal concordat on other grounds are successively tried and prove abortive, is more and more clearly seen to be the true and only basis. It has been too much the idea of sects and denominations in later ages to maintain a scriptural form of worship—that is to say, of Church service and arrangement—and along with this to bear testimony to the truth of one particular view of scriptural doctrine. Their object has been to secure the spiritual gain of their own adherents, above all by not permitting false worship to be celebrated, or false doctrine to be taught. Most sects have been founded, most sectarian animosities and contentions have proceeded upon the ground of opposition to a doubtful form of worship, or an erroneous view of Scripture. Opposition to man, not dedication to God, has been the origin of sects. Their anxiety has been not how to do good, but how not to do evil. We have come, however, to a time in the history of the Church when it is generally seen that on this ground no union of Christendom, and consequently no great advance of the Church of Christ, is possible. Allow that Christianity has a form of worship like other religions, and that it is the great business of churches to discover from Scripture or antiquity what that form of worship is and to maintain it, when it is discovered, at all cost, in defiance of all opposition, and the history of ages and generations would go to show that the millennium of the Church is in the

past, not in the future. The union of Christendom, the peace of the world, the kingdom of God, would be farther away from us the farther we advance into the future.

But while it is thus only too manifest that no basis for the union of Churches and the peace of Christendom is to be found in purity of worship, it is only the more evident that there is a basis for that union and peace in the true ritual of the Christian faith. If Churches cannot unite not to do evil, they can unite and will unite to do good.

There is a great deal that stands in the way of men becoming, not to say, perfect—the word is almost ridiculous as applied to masses of men even in this Christian country—but becoming decent, honest, pure, intelligent; in a word, becoming men at all. A host of our present social arrangements are of a kind which insure, as far as they operate—and they operate very far—that men shall not become men at all. Go out of almost any church in any of our great cities—any of those great centres into which so large a proportion of our whole population is being rapidly gathered—and consider what surrounds that church, has surrounded it, perhaps, for ages and generations. Walk about Zion, and consider, not its palaces, but its dens and hovels, abodes of ancient inevitable ignorance, vice, crime. Multitudes of children untaught, uncared for; while the sects are wrangling over the precise form in which religious education shall be administered, another education, under

another master than Christ, going forward steadily from age to age—an education in vice and crime, in stolid and brutal inhumanity.

Not to speak of the world lying in darkness abroad, this is the spectacle which presents itself to us at home. If sects have not caused it, at any rate they have not been able to abolish it. But, be this as it may, the Christian Church, in the existence of all that sin and misery which abounds in the world, has an opportunity for establishing the union of Christendom upon an enduring, because a true, a Christian basis. Sects differ about trifles, and about principles; about great things and small things. But they are all agreed that there are many evils afflicting human society which ought to be abolished, and that there are many good works which ought to be begun. As "there is no sect in mathematics," so there is no sect in favour of ignorance, or fever, or improper dwellings, or drunkenness, or immorality, or crime, or misery, or want. These things make havoc of human life and human society; and all sects are against these. All sects are agreed that to diminish these by any means, and to promote in place of them intelligence, virtue, and humanity, is to do good. Here, then, is a basis of union. We cannot agree how not to do evil. But here is an infinite abundance of opportunities of doing good; and to do good, and not merely not to do evil, not merely not to be in error in our worship, or our doctrine, is the true and only ritual of the Christian

faith. We all believe in doing good. Why, because we cannot agree about not doing evil should we not agree about doing good? It is the vital and essential part of Christianity to believe in charity and to practise it. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Pure worship is to do good. On this ground, when sects have had their day, and the falsity of the foundation on which they stand is better seen, peace will be restored to the Church, peace will be given to the world by the Church, and glory will be rendered to God in the highest.

The Christian Church which has been understood to be a devotional institution and a theological club, is in reality a society of perfectionists. It does not exist merely to exist. It has a work to do, a purpose to accomplish. Take any public or charitable society. It consists of public-spirited or charitable persons who have common sympathies and common opinions, but its object is not merely to exist and be a society; it has some special object in view, some special work which it sets itself to accomplish. A society, for example, for the relief of indigent old women will most likely consist of benevolent and amiable persons; but the reason for the existence of such a society will never be that there are benevolent and amiable people ready to meet together, but that there are old and indigent persons who need to be clothed and fed. It is the very same with the Christian Church. It is neither a devotional institution, meeting once a week, nor a theological club in which one member

lectures the rest; but it is a society of people who believe in Christ's life, and desire to live that life. It exists to fulfil a purpose and to accomplish a work—that work for which Christ lived and died—the salvation of men from sin and misery, their restoration to God and life and blessedness.

This being the work and end, this being the ritual of the religion of Christ, that religion claims to be the one true, everlasting faith. In this light, and apart from questions of doctrine and of worship which have rent the Church asunder, the universal heart and conscience bear testimony to its truth. That which abrogates selfishness in God and makes Him Father, which abolishes selfishness in man and makes him brother, blessed in the love of God, and of his kind; that which gives back to the infinitely Good a world of evil restored to beauty, as the tribute due to Him and acceptable to him, is a religion which may for a time be corrupted and suffer eclipse, but it is of heaven, it is true to the conscience and to the universe, and it will endure while man exists to worship, and God to be adored.

XI.

IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

"Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." 1 Cor. i, 12.

It was a rumour in Paul's time that there were contentions among the Christians at Corinth—every one of them saying, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. This rumour was conveyed to him by those that were of the house of Chloe; members of that family coming from Corinth to the place where he was brought it to his ears, and when he heard it he was astounded, not to say grieved. He could scarcely believe it. What, he asked in sheer amazement, is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

What would he have said if he had seen or heard tell of our religious contentions? For three or four parties then, we have I know not how many scores or hundreds of sects now. And in proportion to the number of our contentions is the openness with which we avow them. If it was a matter of rumour

in Paul's time that there were three or four parties, it is a thing which we take all the pains in the world to declare that now we have scores of sects. We build churches, we hold meetings, we publish journals and magazines, we pay lecturers, we endow schools and colleges to preach Christianity, indeed, but first and foremost to proclaim the fact that Christ is divided, and that we have been baptized in the name of Paul, or of Peter, or of Apollos. Instead of being ashamed of our divisions we glory in them. Each sect is faithful to its principles only when it is zealous in proclaiming its differences with other sects. Besides all those distinctions of trade and calling and rank which exist among us, there are other divisions crossing all these, and in many instances going deeper into our social life than all these, which are divisions caused by our religion—the religion of Christ. What ought to unite us in spite of all possible differences, divides us in spite of all bonds of union. High Church, Low Church, Broad Church, Established Church, Dissenting Church, Roman Catholic Church—these distinctions split up the people of this country into hostile camps as no political, no social, no intellectual distinctions have the power or the will to do.

What would Paul have said to such a state of things? Is Christ divided and sub-divided and torn to shreds? he would certainly have asked with more astonishment than he ever felt in his lifetime.

Our modern contentions, like those which so long ago astonished him, for the most part father them-

selves upon honourable names—I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ. Sects or parties look back or look up to this or that man or set of men, and if they do not call themselves by their names, at any rate they claim to be the sect or party who hold their views. We have sects and parties who call themselves by the name of some man living or dead; others have one man or a set of men of whom they profess to be the only legitimate disciples. Then, again, in any place where there are more churches than one (as what place in this country, however much of a fishing village, and however little of a populous town it may be, is free from this misfortune), take the majority of Christian people belonging to them, and you will find that they are divided, even bitterly divided, if not about the doctrines of their respective churches, at any rate about the ministers who preach those doctrines.

We have no one knows how many divisions in our Christian body. They are mostly about men. No human being with a grain of common sense can suppose that they are divisions arising from a careful and intelligent study of the Bible and religious questions on the part of the majority of the people. It is not many men many minds: it is rather many men and not a mind among them. It is not that people in general inquire into religious matters for themselves, and arrive at different conclusions: it is that people for one reason and another only require for their religious views the authority of

somebody's name, and that the Christianity of sects and divisions at war with each other, is somehow, to the multitude, a more intelligible and more palatable Christianity than that of Jesus Christ.

Sects there are, however, and will be, and it is of little use complaining that they exist, or being astonished at their existence. If they are all of them or most of them founded upon names and not upon principles, we may be sorry for that, or we may smile at it, or pour ridicule upon it, but there it is. It is not at any rate by schemes of union, which are really holy alliances to carry on war, that the nuisance of sects will be abolished or abated. If you had such a union to-morrow as has been proposed, a union of all Presbyterians, or of all Episcopalians, you would only have a few more divisions as the result of it.

Yet there is something to be done, perhaps, if not with sects, at any rate with individuals of all sects, who are in danger of being influenced by the abominable spirit of the sects. If we cannot hope to abolish one sect, any more than to eradicate sin and misery, we may possibly do something towards clearing away from a mind here and there some of those miserable prejudices out of which sects arise and are multiplied.

There is one thing, then, which it is worth while to consider with this view, viz., that the great and good whose names are taken as watch-words and war-cries by the sects, differed only in trifles, while they agreed in all that is essential and important

so that the way we commonly take to honour their memory, is the proper way to insult their character.

In another chapter Paul, still referring to these contentions and divisions, says—Let no man glory in men; all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Every sect and variety of Christian sentiment and character is yours, if only you are Christian at all. And this is true for a plain reason. Look at some superficial things and there seems to be a great difference between Paul and Apollos, and between Apollos and Cephas, between Catholic and Protestant Christian, between Established Church good man and Nonconformist good man. They have different ways of looking at some things, and of expressing themselves in regard to the things about which they differ, but then, again, those things about which they differ are all of one sort—superficial and trifling. Look to what is important and essential as regards life and character, truth, nobleness, love to Christ, love to God and man; and where is the difference among all these Christians and good men? Paul could say truly, therefore, to his converts at Corinth, if you are Christians, all Christians, however they differ among themselves, are yours; they are really one, though they appear to be many; they have all essentially the same spirit, the same character, the same faith. If you have one, you have all the rest. If you have one good man, you have all good men: for there are not many sorts of good men, but only one sort.

And in the same way we may say with regard to those eminent Christians whose names we make our war-cries—it is not one of them is yours, if you are of a Christian spirit, but all of them: not John Knox only, or John Calvin only, or Richard Baxter, or John Wesley, or Ralph Erskine, but all those, of whatever creed or whatever race, who like these men were followers of Christ in their love to God and man.

It is only fair, and it is certainly instructive, thus to view our great Christian worthies, not as they differed, but as they agreed. There is a Christian union that is better worth studying than those unions of churches which have been so often projected, a union which you not only do not need laboriously to promote, but which you cannot by any endeavour prevent. It is the union, or rather the unity of all who have done any honour to the Christian name, of all whose names are in any sense worthy of remembrance in the Christian Church. Many of them took their share in the strife and controversy of their day, and those things about which strife and controversy then raged, are now, as was inevitable, either forgotten or comparatively despised, but the lesson which we get from comparing their characters and their lives, is that among Christians there is a unity which is not made by the skilful diplomacy of church leaders, but is the result of the spirit of God lifting men above the vanity and the selfishness of both the world and the Church.

It is good, I say, to look at the great representatives of Christianity, those whom sects delight to name, if not to honour, in this their essential unity. To dwell upon how this man differed from that two or three hundred years ago on a point of doctrine or of Church government; to look up to this man or that as pope or father in matters of conscience—the result of this, we see, is to divide people by their religion, and to embitter them against each other by the peace of God; it is to have great masses of people putting their unmeaning ecclesiastical shibboleths in the place of those great things, truth and righteousness and love, in regard to which common-sense is the amen to Christianity. Without thinking of how they agreed, but only or chiefly of how they differed, people, instead of being the better for having great men in the world before them, are losers in respect of their Christianity, or rather sometimes are unchristianized altogether. There are Protestants who detest Papists with a detestation which, whatever it may indicate as to the Christianity of their opponents, is decisive as to the quality of their own. There are zealots and fanatics in regard to Establishment principles and Voluntary principles who, in their assertion of those principles, make it certain that the one great principle of Christianity is in doubt with them, or rather is condemned.

Name to me the hundred names of greatest eminence in the history of the Christian Church, apostles, fathers, martyrs, missionaries, doctors,

heroes, saints—I will be able to show you the most extraordinary variety of tastes and dispositions among them, as well as the most singular differences of opinion. While one of the hundred thinks almost the only way to live a godly life is to dwell in a cave in the desert and pray night and day, scourging the flesh to aid the spirit, another hates the very name of monk or hermit, and is none the less a man of God because he is also, at least by capacity and by occupation, a man of the world. One has faith in a variety of sacraments, in fasts and penances, holds them to be effectual and indispensable to salvation; another looks upon all these as superstition and an abomination to the Lord. One accepts almost any report of the miraculous which happens to reach him; another owes any doubt which haunts him solely to the miracles of Scripture. One attaches an indefinite value to the blessing bestowed by a duly ordained priest; another holds in abhorrence priest and presbyter and all orders of clergy. Name to me, I say, the hundred names of greatest acknowledged eminence in the history of the Church, and, not to speak of the variety of temperament, disposition, character, among them, you will find all this variety and more than all this variety of opinion and belief.

But, on the other hand, of the hundred will you find one who has a difference of opinion with another or a few in regard to righteousness, manliness, charity? Of the hundred will you mention

two who disagreed about the duty of speaking the truth, or doing as you would be done by; or will you point me to one who differed from another in not preferring a good conscience to meat and drink and sordid self-interest? Did Paul, who differed from Peter about circumcision, that old commandment of Moses, differ from him or withstand him about charity, that new commandment of Christ? Did the greatest Roman Catholic saints of the time differ from the greatest of the Protestant Reformers about whether truth is better than falsehood, or honesty and courage preferable to hypocrisy and cowardice? Did Martin Luther differ from St. Francis about the duty of ministering to the wants of the poor, the outcast, the afflicted? In all those innumerable Church controversies that we have had upon small points and greater points in this country, eminent men, men whose names are generally revered, have taken their part or acquired their fame from the part they took—did any two of them, in the greatest heat and fury of controversy, ever dispute about whether it was wrong to steal or whether it was right to lie?

It is not, I say, how they differed, but how they agreed that is the wonderful thing and the important thing to be noted with regard to our Christian leaders and great men. The questions about which they differed were trifles at the best, or, however important in the eyes of one generation, could not maintain their importance in the view of succeeding ages. The questions about which they

agreed were the questions, if there are such, of life and death. Fill your mind with the things about which they differed and you will be none the better, very possibly you will be much the worse for it. Fix your attention upon those things about which they agreed and there is no fear but, however great your attention is, it will be well bestowed. Think of our great Christian worthies, and not how they differed, but how they agreed, to what do you learn to attach weight? Not to those things about which churches and church parties contend, but to truth, honesty, courage, charity, faith in God as good. Think of how they agreed rather than of how they differed, and much of what passes for Christianity at the present day, in the light of what always was, always is, Christianity, will seem to you counterfeit and poor. But, on the other hand, in that light you will see how evangelical, how orthodox, how Christian, how fruitful, is the faith that to love God and man is all the law and the prophets.

We have made so much of the differences which our great Christian leaders have left us, though their differences were trivial, that we have come to treat as trifles those things which in common they held to be supreme and sacred. This is the worst of our divisions. They not only hinder Christianity from spreading, a result all sects deplore, but they make Christianity not worth spreading, a result which no sect will admit. Is it not a common thing in all sects for people to be very religious, much devoted to the Church and to the cause of Christ,

passionate as to what is Protestant, furious as to what is not evangelical, and to show in their conduct no regard whatever to fair play, justice, honesty, let alone charity? This comes of our making much of the differences our Christian worthies have bequeathed to us. Make only as much or half as much of their agreement as of their differences, and you reverse all this—then, if any man affects to be a disciple of Paul or John Knox or John Wesley, you will expect from him that he should at least be an honest man, and if he is not good it will be sorry satisfaction to hear that he is orthodox.

It is, I say, a good thing to dwell upon the fact that our Christian worthies, called by general acclamation to be saints, agreed about some things, however they differed about others, and that the few things about which they agreed, and not the many things about which they differed, are important for us and for all mankind. It is good to fix our minds upon this. There is in this a papacy which is infallible, a scripture which cannot err. We cannot be mistaken if we agree with the great and good where they all agreed. We must be right if, in our beliefs and in our lives, we follow not Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or Calvinist or Arminian or Socinian doctor, or High Church or Low Church or Broad Church oracle, but are followers of all those who through faith and patience have overcome the world. We make all the great and good ours; they lived and thought and toiled and suffered not in vain for us, if we

take note how they one and all fought against the devil of selfishness and self-indulgence, and meant to be servants of God and were the servants of men. Then they are lights to lighten our path when it is dark; their lives are fountains to refresh us when we are weak or weary. If they overcame the world, so may we, though our world may differ much from theirs. We could not follow them if we would in all wherein they differed. But we can all follow them where they agreed. In our several places and conditions we can speak what is true, do what is right, fear God, love man, as they did. And if we do this we shall be blessed in our deed as they were blessed in theirs. They were men of like passions with us. They had their faults, temptations, sins, errors, prejudices as we have ours. By the law which is above every law for all who are human, they failed oftener than they succeeded. But they struggled on—in this they were an army and not a mob—they struggled on, clinging to the right side though in darkness and almost in despair; they counted all things but loss for one sort of excellence; they lived by faith and not by sight; they suffered and grew strong through suffering; they toiled and became workmen, not needing to be ashamed; they fought and waxed valiant in fight. With all their innumerable differences, they had this agreement—let us follow them in this, giving no place to the devil, but striving always to be good and to do good, so that God, the eternal righteousness and love and goodness, may be all

in all, and the victory which they gained we shall gain also. We may not achieve renown like theirs as saints and heroes, but we shall be men whose manhood is another name for salvation and immortal life and eternal blessedness.

XII.

THE CHURCH BENEFICENT.

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews x, 24, 25.

We can scarcely help reading into a passage like this ideas which belong to our time, and not to the time of the writer; that is to say, ideas which are our own rather than his. Our notion as to Christians assembling themselves together is that which has been fixed in our minds by our custom, an old custom now, of attending church on Sundays. It is the notion which one would carry away with him from a meeting like the present, from taking part in public worship, which is conducted by an ordained and official person, and of which a great part, or, as it happens, the greatest part, is the hearing of a sermon. This is our modern way of assembling ourselves together. Hardly any other way, perhaps, has ever occurred to us as possible or desirable. When we find the writer of this epistle here exhorting his readers not to forsake the assembling of

themselves together, we are apt, therefore, to assume that he is just in other words telling them to go to church on Sundays, and take part as we do to-day, in public worship.

The truth is, however—and it is a point which has not received all the consideration to which it is entitled—meetings of Christians in those early times were not exactly of the same character as ours. They could not possibly be exactly what ours are; it is more than questionable whether it would have been thought desirable they should be what ours are supposing it had been possible. Not only were they not as formal as we make ours by having an official person to conduct them, and, in fact, to take up most of the time with set religious discourse—not only were they not as formal as ours are thus made; they had, it is evident, different objects from those at which we aim in ours. You are reminded of this fact here—"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." The kind of meeting to which this pointed was a meeting in which everybody who choose had a voice, in which everybody who had any advice or information or exhortation to give, was free to give it, and was expected to give it.

And this is, perhaps, the least part of the difference between a Christian assembly of that age, and one of our time. Not only was the business done in a different manner; it was, beyond a doubt, different business. These

people who are here charged not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, did not meet to hear a sermon, or to pray and sing hymns ; they met, it is plain, as Christian workers, to discuss their work and to carry it on. Their meetings, held any day of the week, but particularly on the first day, because the day on which Christ rose from the dead, was a holiday, a glad day with them—their meetings were rather what we could call social meetings, or business meetings, than prayer meetings. "To provoke unto love and to good works," to consider one another, to take steps for the relief of their poor, the succour of their sick, the instruction of the young, the conversion of heathen friends, the advancement of their faith, the promotion of every scheme which an enthusiastic philanthropy suggested for making the world better and happier—this was the business which brought them together. They did not meet as we do to sing psalms, pray, and hear a sermon, and go away home till next Sunday. At least, as far as one can make out from Scripture or from history, that was not their way. Their meetings did not end as ours regularly and systematically do, in nothing at all ; if there is anything certain with regard to them, it is that they served to combine the intelligence and the energies of the Christian brotherhood for the accomplishment of a variety of objects which were none the less Christian that they were not always what you would call religious.

And yet it is not to be supposed that on this

account their meetings were less devotional than ours are. Because, instead of being devotional and nothing else, they were taken up chiefly with matters of Christian business, those primitive assemblies which are here in question would not, in the nature of things, be less favourable to the spirit of supplication or the spirit of thanksgiving, than Sunday meetings are now. It is impossible, indeed, they could be so, if only because there can scarcely be a duller affair than public worship (with some exceptions) is among ourselves, and in most of our Protestant communions.

In point of fact, it needs no elaborate argument to show that our Christian brethren of these early times had the advantage of us every way, as regards the very thing at which we chiefly or exclusively aim in our Sunday services, viz., religious or devotional excitement. They had "good works" on hand. When they met together there was what was fresh and interesting, perhaps even stirring, to be mentioned in regard to these works. They had to manage the affairs of a society, the affairs of which were those of practical philanthropy—a society which existed not to talk about work, but to do it. Can any one who knows much of the world, or of human nature, imagine that this would ever extinguish the spirit of devotion in their meetings, as it is often enough in our experience extinguished by a long dull sermon, or that it would not call forth heartier praise and more fervent supplication than is common in our meetings?

I cannot but declare my conviction—I have long been firmly convinced—it is because we have no business in our meetings except devotion, that our devotion is so dull a business. We differ from these early Christians in our way of assembling ourselves together; the difference, it appears to me clear, is all against us, on the score of devotion as well as other things.

I do not, for my part, believe in any magical effect belonging to the habit of attending church regularly. It is commonly believed that a good many people make of their church attendance a substitute for various cardinal virtues, and an atonement for many sins and shortcomings. It has to be admitted, at all events, that between those who attend church with most regularity, and those who attend with least, you cannot draw a line and say—these are good Christians or good men on this side, those are not so good on that. But, on the other hand, considering how much good might be got in many ways from these Sunday meetings of ours, if they were anything like what they ought to be, and considering that even as they are they at least offer the advantages of public worship, it is to be deplored that there are so many who attend church irregularly, or not at all.

I must take for granted for one thing, that every intelligent man, who is not strangely destitute of religious feeling, has known at times the need, or at any rate the good, of joining with numbers in acts of worship. There is something in the voices of a

congregation united in the praise of God which lifts a dull worshipper out of his dulness as nothing else can. When the prayer which we offer is offered in the company of our friends and acquaintances, in the society of old and young, rich and poor of our neighbourhood or religious persuasion, it may be the same prayer as we should offer if we were alone, but it is offered with a different feeling. There is a good in public worship, something of which we have all felt, a good which hardly any human being would be disposed to question. It is to be deplored, therefore, I say, that so many nowadays forsake churches, and, in doing so, at any rate deny themselves whatever profit there is in public worship.

But the difficulty is to apply a remedy to the present state of things, without going further in the direction of revolution than most men are prepared to go or dream of going. It is easy to reprove people from the pulpit for not filling the pews. But it is as useless as it is easy, for one thing, because the reproof, when it is given, must be addressed commonly not to those who need it most, but to those who don't need it at all. Clergymen and office-bearers may go the round of a parish or district, and drag people to church who are reluctant to come; but neither in this way is much good to be accomplished, unless something were also done to keep what is once got.

It is obvious, whatever is the reason of it, our present system of what we call public worship is not what it once was in point of health and vigour,

and rough and ready methods of putting new life into it, from which much is hoped, have little outcome. So far from the attendance at church increasing over the country, it is, I believe, steadily falling off. If there is no decrease in the numbers of people who belong to churches and occasionally go to them, there is a decline among great numbers of that devoted attachment to churches which almost universally existed in this country, at least among the educated and intelligent. Of this perhaps no better, certainly no more striking, evidence could be found than what is supplied by a great deal of the ecclesiastical activity of the present day. There is an anxiety, almost feverish, to be observed in most churches, either to get their old machinery to go better, or to have additions made to it. The deliberations of church courts are characterized by this anxiety. Episcopal pastorals are instinct with it. Ecclesiastical committees and associations almost without number are organized expressions of it. As the result of it, and in token of it, there are demands everywhere for revivals of religion; missions of various kinds to every conceivable class of human beings are established or projected; there are proposals to pay the clergy as schoolmasters are paid, by results—that is to say, according to their success in attracting hearers; stranger and more significant still, the idea gains ground that the labours of an educated ministry should be supplemented or replaced by those of half-educated or illiterate evangelists. I do but scant justice, I

know, to all this ecclesiastical activity when I say that the best possible intentions are at the bottom of it—much devotion to the cause of Christ and the highest interests of mankind—but, at the same time, there can scarcely be a doubt, I think, that it is a sign rather of failing than of vigorous health. It may well be a question, therefore, whether we should not, along with the multiplication of churches or in place of it, begin to consider whether churches ought not to be somewhat different from what they are, and perhaps made a little more like what they were once. While we are thinking only of how to enlarge our ecclesiastical machinery, or to drive it faster, the question perhaps really is, whether it ought not first to be remodelled.

It is useless, I repeat, to spend time in complaining that it is the manner of many among us to forsake the assembling of themselves together. The thing which is to be done, the only remedy for the evil, is to make the church a more attractive institution than it is. Make it more attractive, and more people will come to it. People will never in our day be scolded into church, or even shepherded into it, at any rate to much purpose. They must feel when they come—it is good for us to be here—or they will not come as often, or come with as much good will as could be wished. If our church attendance, then, is small or irregular, the question, as I take it, is how we are to make the church more attractive.

I shall answer this question, then, by pointing out two ways in which we fail to make our church

meetings as interesting and inviting as they ought to be.

In the first place, it is obvious we deny ourselves much of the advantage we might have from attention to what is beautiful and pleasing. I shall not presume to discuss the question whether people should or should not run by thousands to hear a man with a fine voice "sing the Gospel" in the shape of a few rather silly hymns, but the fact is thousands do run to hear him, thousands and tens of thousands who would by no means be in haste to avail themselves of an extra church service. I shall not pretend to determine what amount of good is done or not done when people are thus attracted to a religious meeting by a musical voice. Only, it is safe to say, clergymen and laymen alike by the hundred, or rather by thousands, are ready to testify that a wonderful amount of good is done, and one thing is perhaps to be admitted, viz., that the good that is done does not need to be wonderful in order to equal what is effected in most of our ordinary Sunday assemblies.

It is a singular fact, surely, that people of all churches and all shades of theological opinion agree to approve of a revival meeting being made attractive by good music, while many or most of them would not allow the same thing to be done for an ordinary church service. Here, in Protestant England, we are afraid of that Popery which our forefathers did not so much fear as defy, and in our dread of a false worship which is beautiful, we purposely

make our worship as nearly ugly as we can. Ritualism, or a particular form of it, may be open to the objection that it is sometimes silly and sometimes not altogether ingenuous. But ritualism, in almost any form, has more to say for itself than the popular dread of anything in a church service which is beautiful and pleasing.

There are exceptions to the rule—of late years many of our leading clergymen and laymen have exerted themselves, not without effect, to improve our church arrangements—there are exceptions to the rule, but as a rule what can be more uninviting than the service with which our time in church is occupied? A religious mind, a soul abounding in pious ardour, will find something to kindle its fires in the tamest and crudest and coldest form of worship. But what is there to arouse, to excite, to please the common mass of people in most of our churches? Independently of the sermon altogether—for the sermon is made the most important part of public worship, utterly against the nature of things—there should be excitement in our church services sufficient at any rate to keep people from falling asleep in the middle of them, as it is not a very rare thing to see people do. Congregations, not ministers, no doubt are to blame if this excitement is often conspicuous by its absence. It is as a rule the fault of congregations, not of their ministers, that singing in church is such commonly as makes it something of a calamity for a Christian worshipper to have been born with a musical ear

or to have acquired musical tastes. Wherever the blame may be supposed to rest, it is certain this part of our worship, not the least important part, is in general made as unattractive as complete neglect can make it. Is it different with other parts of our Sunday services? There are many intelligent and earnest men at the present moment who are ready to say no, and not, as it would seem, without a reason. They complain that long extempore prayers, such as are common among ourselves, are often sermons without a text, or Scripture in great disorder. They allege further, that as the sermon is generally made the most important part of the service, so it is generally the most tedious part. And, indeed, on this subject there is this to be said, that where there is so much preaching of formal sermons as churches require from ministers, much of it, or most of it, in the nature of things, and as long as born orators are scarce, must be dull and wearisome common-place. If this, then, or anything like this, is the account which is to be given of our public worship, or a great part of it, we can scarcely wonder if there are some who forsake it, and many who are not attracted by it. We may be sure, at any rate, that the way in which we deny ourselves the advantage of what is beautiful and pleasing in our Sunday services, has not a little to do with the fact that they are so irregularly attended.

But I have said much more than I intended to say on this head, and I hasten now to remark, that

while we more or less deny ourselves the advantage of the beautiful, we altogether reject the far greater advantage of the practical and useful.

To put the matter broadly—in connection with churches much good work is done, done by ministers and office-bearers, by committees, by associations of members, but as churches we do nothing. When we come together here on Sunday, after having been for hundreds of Sundays in the habit of coming, it is just to go through the old routine of prayer, praise, sermon, and go away home; the congregation, as a congregation, after the benediction, goes away home, that is to say, goes out of existence. Nothing equals the regularity with which our meeting takes place, except the regularity with which nothing comes of it. There is nothing new under the sun, and particularly under the roof of a modern church. From Sunday to Sunday we are exhorted to work together for God, but, as a body of Christians thus constantly exhorted to do something, we answer constantly by doing nothing. Here is one of many thousands of congregations in this country—what are we doing except meeting on Sundays, to talk of work which we ought to do and which we never begin? We have no work on hand, though surely there is plenty of work to do, work, I mean, which a society calling itself Christian should attempt to do. Or, if there is no work for us to do, why should we be always talking of work? All our preaching goes in at one ear and out at the other, as far as the con-

gregation is concerned. Take them as they commonly are, churches are like corn-mills carefully constructed and plentifully supplied with steam or water power, but never put in motion, never made to grind a bushel of grain. In our congregational life it is all saying and no doing. Sunday is our great religious day, the day on which, if at all, we ought to do that Christian work which we are always talking of doing. It is considered very religious to go to church for an hour or two, and for the rest of the day to shut ourselves up at home with our Bibles or some other religious book, as if Sunday were for us a sort of spiritual penitentiary or infirmary, in which, to save our own souls, we must undergo our regular confinement, let the business and welfare of the world wag how they will. Now the result of this, I think, can only be what we see it is; our Sunday meetings have no particular object, and therefore no particular interest; they do not subserve those directly practical and useful ends for which other meetings are held, and, consequently, they have none of the liveliness which belongs to other meetings.

It would involve the remodelling of our churches to an extent to which few of us, perhaps, would care to see them remodelled; but, if the practical and useful were as prominent in their arrangements as other things are, they would not have to complain so much as they have now, of being forsaken. What is needed to fill churches and put life into them, is to revert to the original idea of a church,

and make it a society "to provoke unto love and to good works." We are accustomed to look upon our church membership and church attendance as so much religious duty to be done, so much sacrifice and offering to be paid, by us, with a view to our own salvation. But there is another view altogether to be taken of the matter, and that is, that as Christians we are bound to associate together to do Christian work. And to demonstrate that this is the right view, I might quote, not a text, but the New Testament. Suppose, then, we looked upon our church membership and church attendance as so much association for the purpose of doing good after the example of Christ, and suppose every time we met together we kept this purpose in view, we should find for one thing, I think, that "he prayeth best who loveth best," and that Christian business is a wonderful help to Christian devotion. We are many in number, we have means enough at our command of one kind and another for doing some real good. If we were, as a society, engaged in doing it, we should not, as a congregation, have to depend for the interest of our meetings upon what a minister has to give us in the shape of a sermon. In carrying on our work the practical and useful would come to the aid of devotion; devotion would aid work; we should meet difficulties, and pray the better on account of them; we should have some success, and because of it sing a more hearty song.

If we were, even in the loosest sort of way,

united as a congregation in an endeavour to further Christian objects, to relieve the poor, to comfort the sick, to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim the erring, to remove temptation out of the way of the young, to promote decency, sobriety, honesty, truth, gentleness—if we were ever so loosely united as a congregation in this endeavour, it is impossible, being as many as we are, that we should not accomplish something. Now, if there were this kind of business first, and devotion followed it, or if business and devotion were somehow combined in the order of our Sunday services, we should have what gives zest to meetings for other and inferior purposes—the sense that we are dealing with what is of immediate practical utility to ourselves and to others. Were we able to report to-day that some work for the poor, or the sick, or the ignorant, or the tempted had been done by us since last Sunday, or had we now met to spend part of our time in considering what work of that kind might be attempted by us this week, I need not say our meeting would be more lively, for one thing, than our meetings usually are, and not the least so in respect of our devotions. And if in this way, in church meetings in general, there were substituted something of the eventful activity of the busy world for the humdrum piety of the cloister, more would be done than will ever be done otherwise to make churches attractive to multitudes for whom they have now little attraction or none.

Various objections, no doubt, may be made to

the proposal to reconstruct churches after so primitive a model as is here in question, and among them one which seems decisive, viz., that any proposal of the kind is simply impracticable. How is it possible, it may be asked, to take churches as they stand—institutions for the maintenance of public worship on Sundays—and, in place of the slight and elastic constitution which serves their turn, and which makes of their membership a motley multitude indeed, give them any organization of the kind which is required for work? This difficulty may be urged, and it seems formidable—indeed it is formidable. It would not be an easy task, it must be granted, to convert churches as they are into what they ought to be. But there is an answer to be given to any objection which is started on this ground to church-reform being proposed or attempted. In matters spiritual, if not in any other matters, it does not follow, because a thing is impracticable, that no account must be taken of it. If there is anything impracticable for all mankind, it is the attainment of divine perfection. But none the less, an authority higher than that of any church makes it a rule for every man that that perfection should be his aim; and no one, I suppose, will venture to say that it is useless, let alone improper, that such a rule should have been laid down. Though it is impossible to reach the perfection of the Eternal, it is life eternal and divine to strive to reach it. If it were shown, then, with reference to what has been indicated as the original

and the proper aim of Christian churches, that it is impracticable, this would be no more than what could be shown with regard to spiritual aims in general, and in particular the supreme aim of every Christian mind, and no more in the one case than in the other would it follow that the impracticable must count for nothing.

The truth is, however, that, so far from its being impossible to give churches other aims than they now have, not a few instances might be quoted to show that the thing is easily done. There are Christian congregations to which we could point in which the idea that Christian work is the business and the bond of Christian society has found expression for itself in their organization being extended so as to include a vast deal more than the maintenance of public worship on Sundays. To some extent, at least, their example might be followed by most churches. Some work or other most of them might undertake; some machinery for doing that work need not be beyond their powers of invention. But what I wish to maintain is, that, no matter how impracticable the idea of Christian churches of which we speak may be, or may seem to be, it is the true idea, and only to keep it in view would do a world of good, or, at any rate, prevent a world of evil.

In the first place, were it only understood that Christian churches, whatever else they may or may not be, are essentially associations for doing good, after the manner of Jesus Christ, sects and

sectarianism would become ridiculous or infamous. According to sectarian notions, churches are associations of sinners wishing to be saved, and having different views of things which they suppose concern their salvation. Put in place of this conception of Christian churches the idea that they are associations of Christians for doing good, and it will seem absurd for sects to go on doing the things which ought not to be done, in the way of strife and animosity, and wholesale waste of money and energy, and leaving undone the things which ought to be done, in the way of bettering the world. Substitute the one idea for the other, make churches what the change would make them, and then you might say to a man, or a body of men, threatening dissent and schism on the score of a doctrine or a rite or a point of church polity—you may be right or you may be wrong in regard to any matter of that kind, but to justify your separating from us what needs to be shown is that charity is a principle with you in a sense in which it is not a principle with us, that this is where we are at issue with each other—is it lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath day and every day?

Instead of begging sects for Christ's sake to abate their pretensions, encourage them to pitch them as high as they can be pitched. It is the sure way first to diminish the number of sects, and then to abolish them. It is a cheap superiority, which is attained upon the footing of correct opinions on points of dispute among Christians. The honour

costs the wearer little or nothing. But give and take no quarter in respect to one thing—charity; apply the rule to parties as well as to men, "By their fruits ye shall know them;" suffer no sect to claim any less valid a reason for its existence than that it possesses a monopoly of Christian philanthropy — this will tend to elevate sects into a position of difficulty and of glory where few of them would long survive, and where those few would have few adherents.

The same reform of churches, I remark further, which would tend to abolish sects, would tend to heighten the standard of morals in Christian society. As churches exist at present, institutions for the maintenance of public worship they are largely frequented by people whose only or whose chief profession of Christianity consists in putting on their Sunday clothes to go to church. Multitudes attend church on Sundays consciously or unconsciously saying to themselves that by doing so no more is meant than a general respect for religious ordinances. They go to hear a sermon from a preacher paid for preaching it, without committing themselves by the act to anything, except to sit and listen. As for the other parts of the service, prayer and praise, if they get no good from these, it is, they think, their own loss and nobody else's business. Rather, perhaps, their notion, if it were carefully analysed, would be found to be that public worship, on the whole, is a kind of penance, the advantage of which, as a

substitute for goodness, those who know least good of themselves should be most careful not to forego. Thus we have multitudes who are professing Christians on Sundays and not on other days, who have no conscience as to any inconsistency between regular church attendance and regular disregard of Christian duties and Christian obligations. The complaint of commercial dishonesty (to mention only one thing of the kind), of which we hear so much at the present day, is a complaint which touches people who mostly go to church with exemplary regularity.

But this could hardly be as it is if the true idea of a Christian church were more prominent in all our ecclesiastical affairs. Put forward in all your Sunday services the fact that the Church of Christ is an association for doing good to the world, it will be preposterous then for a man to belong to it who, instead of doing good to his neighbours, is indifferent to their welfare, not to speak of doing them harm; it will be absurd for a man to say —I belong to that great philanthropic society the Church; I attend all its meetings; I take part in all its business; but all that is an affair of one day in the week, and on other days I have no more scruple about lying or cheating or slandering, than other people who don't belong to the society.

If it be objected that any more practical scheme of church life than is common is impracticable, there is an answer, then, to be given to the objection.

Before I conclude, let me advert for a moment to another objection which may also be urged. Would you, some one may ask, suppose it were possible, divert the activity of churches from those purely spiritual objects, which only churches are fitted to promote, and direct it to philanthropic but still secular ends, which other institutions and other agencies are intended to further, and are possibly better fitted to further? To this, however, it is to be answered, that charity never faileth, nor the need for that organized charity which a church ought to be. When all other institutions and agencies, even the most benevolent and most useful, have done their best, much will still remain to be done for the welfare of mankind, much which only Christian philanthropy can do, or will attempt to do, and it is the business of churches to concern themselves with that.

It is not desirable, I grant, that churches should be made, in one sense, more political or more secular than they are. Any one who takes an interest in the proceedings of councils, convocations, synods, and notes how much of their business is political and secular, or done with an eye to the movements of political and secular parties, and in a purely political and secular spirit, will be disposed to think, perhaps, that churches, as represented by their courts, are only too political and too secular already. But, if this is so, the reason is obvious. Church courts, which consist chiefly or exclusively of the clergy, only too well represent the character

of churches, of which the laity have nothing or next to nothing to do. Those whose lives are devoted exclusively to the service of a particular church, naturally contract a zeal for the interests of that church, which is apt to find occasion for displaying itself in every conceivable kind of affairs, small as well as large, secular as well as sacred, and, indeed, is apt to discover in almost every event and movement of the time something at which the Church ought to take alarm, and against which it ought to strive as if for its life. As churches are at present constituted, their activity being chiefly clerical, this zeal for their own interests largely prevails in them, and gives often to their proceedings more than enough of a political or secular character. But the Sabbath and the Church were made for man, and not man for the Church and the Sabbath, and while churches, as a matter of fact, ask what is best for the interests of the church, there is another question which they might ask, and, indeed, ought to ask, viz., what is best for the welfare of the community and of mankind? Were this the question, then, with churches, as the association of all classes of people in their counsels and in their activity would tend to make it, they would turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; they would sow and reap in neglected fields, instead of marching out on many a false alarm to meet imaginary foes; industry would be their policy, and it would be peace.

What is proposed, then, is not by any means to

degrade churches into any lower sphere than that which they now fill. But, as long as barbarism in its worst form, pauperism, vice, crime, class hatreds, and the worse hatred of sects, prevail as they do; as long as popular amusements and popular literature show the bent of the popular mind towards what is low and vicious, in point of taste and in point of morals, churches have plenty of work to do which only associations of Christian philanthropists can be expected to undertake, and in the doing of which the least of all their anxieties may well be lest they should meddle with business not their own.

To churches, if this were their character, the glory might belong of solving, or helping to solve, problems which are the despair of governments and legislatures, and, at the same time that they were doing work which other civilizing agencies have tried to do and have failed to do, they might do more than they have ever yet done to advance their own great spiritual aims by changing for multitudes conditions and circumstances which hinder spiritual life or make it impossible.

If there be any truth in all this, I cannot but add, it will commend itself especially to those who connect the best hopes of the human race with the existence of the Church of Christ, and who, in their anxiety for its prosperity, have some regard to the future as well as to the present. While all churches are more or less in the habit of identifying their existence and their prosperity,

and the maintenance of every one of their peculiar tenets, with nothing less stable than the will of God and the kingdom of God, it is evident to many thoughtful minds, that as churches have yielded to time in the past, and submitted to reform and reconstruction, so they may have to do and are likely to have to do again. Considering, indeed, how much of the intelligence of the age is in open revolt against churches, or against the policy, which is common to them all, of staking their existence on the maintenance of every jot and tittle of creeds and traditions of the fathers; considering also how many causes are at work tending to undermine or displace the authority of the pulpit, on which churches so much rely for their efficiency and their influence, many intelligent observers foresee for churches, at no distant period, more perilous times than any of which most of them have had any experience. The question which the most illustrious statesman of our time has raised, chiefly on the score of endowments, with regard to the church of which he is himself a devoted adherent—"Is it worth preserving?"—is a question which every church must expect to find debated with regard to itself, on any and on every ground on which it asserts a claim to attention or respect. Prescription and authority count for little in an age which reckons it to be the duty of every man to think for himself. In such an age it is no longer what claims to be sacred or divine which must not be touched by hands profane, but only

what proves itself to be divine or sacred. In this view hardly too much importance can be assigned to the consideration that the footing upon which churches choose to stand at present is neither that upon which they have always stood, nor that upon which they are bound always to stand. To those who wish them well, and to those (if there are any) who wish them ill, it must be a matter of grave concern to reflect that if the breaking-up of churches is threatened on one side, it may only be to clear the ground for their being rebuilt on a more enduring foundation. The fate of Christianity is not involved in the fate of churches. If the old order in the ecclesiastical world is to end, its place will be taken, not by worse, but better. Let the new order in the Church of Christ be that which leaves minds free, and gives scope for charity—it will only be the earliest order of all restored—and the Church will flourish as long as there are men to claim relations with God as their Father, and with each other as brethren, and against the Church the gates of hell will not prevail.